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By CHRISTIAN DIOR

*Translated from the French by
Antonia Fraser*

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY, INC.
New York • 1957

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FIRST EDITION

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*Published in France by Amiot-Dumont under
the title of Christian Dior et Moi*

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PROLOGUE

THE TWO CHRISTIAN DIORS

REVIEWERS often describe the authors of memoirs as "looking back to their pasts." I have never liked this expression; for one thing it suggests that the writer needs to "look back," and for another, it implies that his past is already dead and gone. I should like to say right away that I feel no need to "look back" to my past, and I certainly feel no false nostalgia for it. I am convinced that my finest memories are yet to come, and that even my past is still young and alive.

After all, Christian Dior's past is only ten years old, and I confess that to me the most interesting part about it is the turn it may take tomorrow.

You will gather from this that there are two Christian Diors; and I am speaking now of Christian Dior, fashion designer, of the Maison Christian Dior, 30, avenue Montaigne, born in 1947. It was in order to tell the truth about the second, ten-year-old Christian Dior that the first Christian Dior decided to write this book. He had already been the subject of quite enough inaccurate discussion, and I felt it was time to let the world know the real facts about him.

In any case, I was afraid that if I waited any longer, I might find myself far away from him. Personally, I always find the years of apprenticeship, when a man is carving out his career, the most exciting part of any autobiography. Unfortunately, once he has left these years behind and entered his period of actual productivity, all too often he can no longer understand and recreate the aspirations of the man he once was.

Alas, the writing of this book has involved me in a completely alien form of expression. I undertook it with many misgivings, and I survey the results without the slightest conceit. Conceit! Some of my readers will smile when they see this and think that since I have written a book concerned entirely with myself and my trade, I cannot convincingly deny being conceited. Let me make myself clear. In this book I shall discuss only subjects which I know at firsthand and can therefore treat with authority. People who are not interested in fashion will not bother to read my book; those who are will find it only natural that I should be the author. I have not voiced my opinion of matters beyond my pen—such as abstract art or constitutional reform; to my mind, that would be real conceit.

I am a good deal less confident about my handling of the problem of the two Christian Diors—Christian Dior, the man in the public eye, and Christian Dior, the private individual—who seem to get further and further apart. The one who has the biggest part in this book is the dress designer. Ensclosed in a magnificent group of buildings on the avenue Montaigne, he is a compound of people, dresses, hats, furs, stockings, perfumes, publicity notices, press photographs, and, every now and then, a small bloodless revolution—made by the scissors rather than the sword—whose reverberations extend to all corners of the world.

Perhaps I should have concentrated entirely on him, and let nothing of myself come through. But then I would have cheated and deprived my story of all that is personal. For I present a very different sort of picture: I was born at Granville in Normandy on January 21, 1905, to Alexandre Louis Maurice Dior, manufacturer, and Madeleine Martin, housewife. Half-Parisian and half-Norman, I am still much attached to my native Normandy, although I rarely go there now. I like

the simple things of life, such as small intimate gatherings of old friends; I detest the noise and bustle of the world and sudden, violent changes.

My fellow countryman, Gustave Flaubert, defended one of the characters in his novels before a court with the bold words: "I am Madame Bovary." And were Christian Dior, couturier, ever to involve me in a similar situation, I should certainly defend him with my last breath: "I am he!" For whether I like it or not, my inmost hopes and dreams are expressed in his creations.

■

PART I

THE BIRTH OF THE
MAISON
CHRISTIAN
DIOR

■

HOW I BECAME CHRISTIAN DIOR

THE MOST important feature of my life—I should be both ungrateful and untruthful if I failed to acknowledge it from the start—has been my good luck. I must also bow to the fortunetellers who predicted it.

I first had my fortune told when I was very young. It was in 1919, near my home, at a bazaar organized to raise funds for the soldiers. There was every kind of entertainment, and we all took some part in it. I dressed myself up as a gypsy, suspended a basket from my neck by ribbons, and sold the fortuneteller's charms. In the evening, when the crowds were thinning out, I found myself near her booth, and she offered to read my palm.

"You will suffer poverty," she said. "But women are lucky for you, and through them you will achieve success. You will make a great deal of money out of them, and you will have to travel widely."

At the time I attached absolutely no importance to her prediction, which seemed complete nonsense to me, but when I went home I reported it faithfully to my parents. The ambiguous phrase: "You will make a great deal of money out of women," has since been fully explained, but at the time it must have mystified my parents just as much as it did me; they were certainly as ignorant about the white slave trade as they were about the world of fashion. And they would as soon have believed that their son could be involved in one as in the other. The threat of poverty also seemed inexplicable, and as

for travel—there were roars of laughter in the family circle.

“Imagine Christian a great traveler! Think of the fuss he makes over just going to see a friend.”

I wonder if my parents would have recognized me at the end of 1945 when the adventure of Christian Dior was just beginning? I scarcely recognized myself. I had spent ten happy years in the world of fashion as a designer at Lucien Lelong. It was a truly delightful existence; I had neither the responsibility of putting my designs into production nor that of selling them. With German withdrawal, the end of the war, and above all the return home of my deported sister (this return incidentally had been steadfastly predicted by a fortuneteller, even at the period of our darkest despair), I was free once more to lead the life of peaceful anonymity which I loved. An unhappy chapter of my life had ended. On the fresh, still unblemished page before me, I hoped to record nothing but happiness.

My optimism enabled me to forget temporarily that we were still living in the aftermath of a terrible war. Traces of it were all around me—damaged buildings, devastated countryside, rationing, the black market, and less serious but of more immediate interest to me, hideous fashions. Hats were far too large, skirts far too short, jackets far too long, shoes far too heavy . . . and worst of all, there were those dreadful mops of hair raised high above the forehead in front and rippling like a mane down the backs of the French women on their bicycles.

I have no doubt that this *zazou*, or half-existentialist, half-zombie, style originated in a desire to taunt the forces of occupation, and in the austerity of Vichy. For lack of other materials, feathers and veils, promoted to the dignity of flags, floated through Paris like revolutionary banners. But this style was already on the way out.

There was only one wartime custom which I was sad to see disappear: we had been forced by the shortage of gasoline to go everywhere on foot, to take pleasant strolls which led to chance encounters with our friends and long, idle gossip along the way—a custom our ancestors, unaware of their good fortune, had enjoyed before us.

It was in the course of one of these pilgrimages from the rue Saint-Florentin to the rue Royale, where I was then living, that I actually met my fate! It appeared to me in the rather humdrum shape of a childhood friend, with whom I had played long ago on the beach at Granville, and whom I had not seen for many long years. He was now a director of Gaston, a dressmaking house in the rue Saint-Florentin, and he apparently knew that I had become a designer.

Gesturing wildly, he exclaimed that our meeting was the most wonderful coincidence. Marcel Boussac, the owner of the House of Gaston, wanted to reorganize the whole House drastically, and was looking for a designer capable of infusing new life into it. Did I know the man in a million capable of undertaking this formidable task? I thought hard for a few moments before telling him regretfully that I could think of no one who would do . . . I still wonder why I never thought of suggesting myself.

However, Fate did not let me escape so easily. I ran into my friend a second time, on exactly the same stretch of sidewalk between the rue Saint-Florentin and the rue Royale. He still had not found his "man in a million." It still did not occur to me to suggest myself.

Before making a third attempt, Fate prepared the scene a little. Pierre Balmain, one of my fellow designers at Lelong, decided to leave and start a new house under his own name—very successfully, as it has turned out. This had the effect of making me think seriously about my own future; for the

first time, I wondered whether I was really devoid of personal ambition. It was true that I was extremely happy at Lelong, and got on well with everyone there, but I was working for someone else, and with another man's ideas and tastes, since my loyalty and sense of responsibility to Lelong prevented me from freely expressing my own.

When Fate brought me face to face with my friend for the third time, at the same place, my mind was made up. Without realizing for a moment that I was altering the whole course of my life, I said boldly: "Well . . . what about me?"

The die was cast.

These comparatively harmless words were scarcely out of my mouth before I was overcome with horror. I suddenly foresaw the dreadful consequences of my rashness. First of all, I should have to meet the famous Marcel Boussac, head of the Cotton Industry Board. This alone seemed an insurmountable obstacle to someone as shy as I. But that wasn't all. I should have to deal with a host of businessmen who knew nothing about fashions, and the word "business," with its sinister implications, had always terrified me. Worst of all was the prospect of something called a "business lunch." Hitherto I had always associated lunch with the infinitely pleasanter topic of food! Now, before meeting Marcel Boussac for the first time, I was to talk things over with his right-hand man, M. Fayol, in the course of one of these grim functions.

I was greatly relieved to find that M. Fayol—who later became a great friend—wore neither a black jacket nor striped trousers nor a stiff collar; his vest pockets were not stuffed with agenda, memoranda, and fountain pens; and like me, he enjoyed his food. Best of all, he did not ask me searching questions and then try to trip me up when I answered. Tall, impressive, and extremely straightforward, he was a kind,

good-natured man, anxious to put me at my ease. Furthermore, he appreciated feminine elegance because his own wife, Nadine Picard, adored clothes. At all events, he seemed prepared to believe that my ignorance of business was not a sign of mental deficiency. I apparently didn't create the impression of a sheltered innocent trying to earn his living in a hard world!

As a matter of fact, that was exactly how I thought of myself, and it took me a long time to overcome this complex of mine. Having entered very late into this profession which others had spent a lifetime learning, and having only instinct to guide me, I had always been afraid of betraying my ignorance. Perhaps it was this very fear of remaining the perpetual amateur that spurred me on to brush aside my doubts at last and create the character of Christian Dior, the couturier.

When M. Fayol and I parted, I think we were quite pleased with each other. We agreed that the first essential step was for me to pay an extended visit to the Maison Gaston, in order to see how the business was run. It was a splendid excuse for me to put off making any serious decision, to delay the fatal day when I should have to leave Lelong.

Three days later I entered what had been christened in the summer of 1925 "Maison Philippe et Gaston." As a school-boy, I had gaped at the exquisite clothes which the blonde beauty, Huguette Duflos, had bought from this house. Later it became quite simply "Gaston," and unfortunately suffered a great deal from wartime difficulties and restrictions; it now dealt only in furs, and had an old-fashioned atmosphere which I personally thought it would be impossible to get rid of.

I inspected the whole business from top to bottom most conscientiously, but from the first I was convinced that Marcel Boussac would be wasting his time and money in trying to restore Gaston to its former glory. So many others before me

had tried to resurrect once famous names without success; the existence of a dressmaking house is burdened with uncertainties, and its life span is often far shorter than that of the men who run it. My heart sank at the thought of the hazards involved, the cobwebs which would have to be swept away, the difficulties of coping with a staff that had been set in its ways for so many years, and would certainly resent changes—in short, the impossibility of adding “new wine to old bottles” in a trade where true originality is all important. As I left Gaston, I decided that I was not meant by nature to revive the dead.

The answer was definitely no.

I must admit that I was secretly much relieved. Now I should not have to face Lelong with the news that I was leaving; I should not have to take an interest in “business”; I could sink back into my pleasant little world, to which I was so sentimentally attached. After so many years of hardship, I was prepared to cling tenaciously to it.

Consequently I went to the Cotton Industry Board the next morning with a light heart, knowing that nothing would come of it, because I intended to refuse Boussac’s offer politely but firmly. I found him waiting for me. And I immediately liked both this man and his surroundings. There were plenty of books, some beautiful pieces of Empire furniture, and a desk on which a bronze race horse (a model of one of Boussac’s favorites) held an honored place. Behind it on the wall hung a *gouache* of Rome.

In the center of all this was the great man himself. Of medium height, and stockily built, he had a determined forehead, square jaw, and very precise speech and gestures; but a genuinely charming smile lit up his otherwise rather severe appearance. As I sat down facing him, I suddenly realized what my true ambition was. Here was a famous financier, who

was at the same time a cultured and well-informed man. I knew him to be the son of Mme Jeanne Catulle-Mendès and the husband of Fanny Heldy, whom I had so often admired at the Opera. Obviously his interests extended far beyond the two subjects of which I was so lamentably ignorant—money and horses. I felt that we should get on extremely well together.

Shy people often have a very abrupt way of speaking. I suddenly heard myself telling him that what I really wanted to do was not to resurrect Gaston, but to create a new fashion establishment under my own name, in a district of my own choosing. I wanted a house in which every single thing would be new, from the make-up of the staff and its spirit down to the furniture and even the address. All around us, life was beginning anew; it was time for a new trend in fashion. Daringly I described the house of my dreams. It would be small and secluded, with very few workrooms, but within those rooms the work would be done according to the highest traditions of dressmaking. The designs for all their apparent simplicity would, in fact, involve elaborate workmanship and be aimed at a clientele of really fashionable women. After the prolonged stagnation of the war years, I believed that there was a genuine unsatisfied desire throughout the world for something new in fashion. In order to meet this demand, French designers would have to return to the traditions of great luxury. This was why I envisaged my house as a "craftsman's workshop," rather than a "clothes factory."

Out of breath, and amazed at my own temerity, I stopped short. Marcel Boussac had heard me out with great patience, and before escorting me to the door he told me that although I had outlined a plan quite different from the one he had envisaged, one that was perhaps overly ambitious, nevertheless it interested him, and he would like to have time to think it

over. Immediately I felt that he must have been amazed at my self-confidence. As for myself, I was still suffering from the shock of discovering that having gone to see him in order to say "no," I had ended up by outlining a plan which sounded very much like "yes."

Several days elapsed before I heard that the Boussac group was definitely interested in my project—days in which I suffered the tortures of doubt. I had begun to hope so fervently that nothing would come of it that this hint of a favorable reply horrified me. Was I going to have to break the news of my departure to Lucien Lelong—who also happened to be a great personal friend of Marcel Boussac—after all? What on earth had I let myself in for?

But I had gone too far to turn back. I could no longer conceal from myself that I had entered into definite negotiations with the Boussac group. As we began to plan the details of the business, however, unexpected difficulties arose. On my side, my reluctance arose not from conceit but from a secret unacknowledged desire to escape from the whole thing. This feeling of panic eventually led me to send a telegram breaking off negotiations completely.

It was at this juncture that I went to see Mme Delahaye, the fortuneteller who had persistently predicted that my sister would return from deportation.

She ordered me sternly to accept the Boussac offer at once. "You *must* create the house of Christian Dior, whatever the conditions," she told me. "Nothing anyone will offer you later can ever compare with the chance open to you now."

In the face of her complete confidence in my future, I bowed my head, or to be exact, I resigned myself to the inevitable. A telephone call to M. Fayol and a few hasty explanations undid the effects of my telegram of refusal. Nego-

tiations were resumed. My unwillingness to co-operate being ended, it now proved unexpectedly easy to reach an agreement with M. Boussac.

I plucked up my courage to break the news of my departure to Lelong, or rather, I went and discussed it first with Mme Raymonde. It was she who had introduced me to Lelong; we had become great friends, and in the past she had frequently given me excellent advice, acting as my guardian angel. I had given her a hint some time before of my negotiations with the Boussac group, and she had made up her own mind to leave the avenue Matignon establishment with me in order to help me in my new enterprise. It was more for my sake than for hers that she asked a friend to go and consult another very secret fortuneteller, called Grandmother, about the future of my enterprise.

Apparently when shown a piece of paper on which I had scribbled a few meaningless sentences, Grandmother went into raptures.

"Astonishing!" she exclaimed. "This house is going to revolutionize fashion!"

She painted such a dazzling picture of the future that we did not dare believe all she told us. But the mere fact that her verdict agreed with that of my own fortuneteller gave me the necessary impetus to break the news to Lelong. In spite of all his promises, above all in spite of my deep personal attachment to him, I stuck to my plan of departure. Mme Raymonde and Mme Delahaye backed me up. It was decided that I should do two more collections for Lelong, while I trained my successor.

I can never thank Lelong sufficiently for the kindness and understanding with which he accepted the fact that my mind was made up. When we parted later, we did so on the best of

terms; in fact, the only unpleasantness of our parting was my own regret at leaving a house where I had been so quietly happy for so long.

Once I had given my decision to my dear friend and generous employer, the problem of finding a suitable house in which to set up my new business became uppermost in my mind. I knew exactly what I wanted—it was the house which I had described to Marcel Boussac—but I had no idea where to find it. Many years before my decisive interview with him, I had in fact stopped short in front of two small houses side by side in the avenue Montaigne—numbers 28 and 30. To my friend Pierre Colle, the art dealer, who was with me, I had pointed out their neat, compact proportions, their air of sober elegance with not the slightest hint of ostentation. Pierre had been the first person to suggest putting up the money for a fashion establishment in my name, and as we stood in front of the twin façades, I said to him jokingly:

“Pierre, if your idea ever comes off, I am determined to set myself up here and nowhere else!”

But at the end of 1945 there was absolutely no reason for either of these two houses to be available. My first move was to turn to the agencies, who supplied me with a number of addresses, all in the same part of the Champs Élysées. The houses they suggested were all extremely smart; the first, in the Place François I^{er}, has since been bought by Mme Manguin. Another, in the avenue Matignon, was enormous, and is now the property of my great friend and fellow couturier, Jean Dessès. I could not bring myself to decide in favor of either one. Neither of them was on the modest scale which I had described to Marcel Boussac; neither of them was quite *my* sort of house. At the same time I could not put off making a decision much longer.

So there I was—distracted by an indecision which might

prove fatal to my whole enterprise, but unable to put an end to it.

At this point somebody remarked quite casually:

“If you’re looking for a house in this area, why don’t you try the avenue Montaigne. The hat shop at number 30 is closing down.”

Sure enough, I discovered that “my house” was available. The Maison Christian Dior was on its way!

A HOUSE OF MY OWN

IN MY CASE "being my own boss" instead of meaning I was free to do as I pleased meant I was faced with the urgent problem of making a success of my new venture. I was now responsible for the entire organization of the future Maison Christian Dior, although I willingly left the administrative details to the Boussac group, which had backed it financially.

But neither administrative efficiency nor financial backing could insure success. It depended entirely on my creative flair. I knew that if I was to emerge victorious in this war of the scissors, I had to be equipped with a first-class staff. I already had Raymonde, whose serene appearance concealed an acute vigilance and sensitivity to every passing trend of fashion. Raymonde was to become my second self—or to be more accurate, my other half. She is my exact complement: she plays Reason to my Fantasy, Order to my Imagination, Discipline to my Freedom, Foresight to my Recklessness, and she knows how to introduce peace into an atmosphere of contention. In short, she has supplied me with all those qualities which I have never had time to acquire for myself, and has steered me successfully through the intricate world of fashion, where I was still a novice.

It is difficult to define Mme Raymonde's exact role in my house: she plays them all and applies to each her invaluable good sense and warm humanity. Nothing escapes her expressive blue eyes.

I next turned to Mme Bricard, who had been such an effec-

tive aide to Molyneux. We had become great friends; Mme Bricard is one of those people, increasingly rare, who make elegance their sole reason for being. Looking at life out of her windows of the Ritz, so to speak, she is superbly indifferent to such extraneous considerations as politics, finance, or economic change. In August she may allow herself a month at a fashionable resort provided it has a luxury hotel and a casino. On the whole her love of the country and nature does not go further than the flowers with which she so well decorates her hats and dresses. Her high standards are inflexible; in fashion she aims directly at that indefinable and perhaps slightly neglected element called *chic*.

Mme Bricard is completely cosmopolitan in her elegance, and I felt that her remarkable character, her inimitable extravagances of taste would have an excellent effect on the far less extravagant temperament I had inherited from my Norman forebears. I knew that her very presence in my house would bring the atmosphere necessary for creation, as much by her reactions—and even her revolts—*against* my ideas, as by her support of them. Her deep knowledge of the traditions of high fashion, or “haute couture,” and her refusal to compromise, seemed the best possible stimulants for a nature like mine, so inclined to be discouraged by the indifference of our era. In her personal tradition of elegance Mme Bricard seemed to me to bring to life that motto which I most prefer: *Je maintiendrai*, I will uphold.

Then I needed someone to act as an intermediary between my own “dream room”—as the eighteenth century called it—and the workrooms where my ideas would be realized in the shape of dresses. At the house of the decorator, Georges Geoffroy, then a designer at Patou, I had been lucky enough to meet Mme Marguerite—“Dame Couture” in person. She has the delicate coloring of a Renoir, and over the years she,

also, has become part of myself—of my “dressmaking” self, if I may so call it. Impetuous and obstinate, quick-tempered and patient, she is so much in love with her work that it has had for her the character of a grand passion. If the world came to an end while she was working on a dress, I really do not believe she would take any notice.

An indefatigable Penelope, nothing is ever beautiful enough, or perfect enough, for her. She will stitch, unstitch, cut, cut again, a hundred times; everyone is forced to pitch in, including myself, and still she is not satisfied. Her enthusiasm mounts as the collection nears completion, and reaches its peak when the models attain such a degree of “finish” that we can say, after twenty fittings: “They look as if they hadn’t ever been touched!”

Mme Marguerite was exactly the sort of person I needed—someone whose love of clothes equaled my own. She was then working for Patou and was one of the pillars of his establishment, but fortunately the prospect of a change of scene and the desire—strange in one who already knew so much—to learn still more about the art of dress design tempted her away. So as to win over this *première* of all “*premières*” (heads of workrooms), I created specially for her the post of *directrice technique* (technical directress), thus extending her sphere to the whole Maison Dior, rather than confining it to one particular workroom.

In order to explain the exact nature of her new position, I must give a brief sketch of the history of dressmaking since the years before the First World War. If the couturiers of today can be compared to play directors, then in the days of Paquin and Doucet they were more like film producers, and their role consisted of exploiting and carrying out the ideas of others.

Of course they needed to have an unerring critical sense in

order to choose among the *toiles* (muslin models) produced by the workrooms and the sketches of the free-lance designers who went from house to house displaying those samples of their work that are still called *petites gravures* or "little prints." But just as the individual dress was the work of many hands—the skirt, sleeve and bodice each intrusted to a different person—the entire collection itself was the work of a multitude of different workrooms and designers, all of them operating in closely guarded secrecy. Only the personal taste of the head of the house gave a certain unity to an otherwise heterogeneous assemblage of garments. The success of a dress depended upon the quality of workmanship, the attention to detail, and above all on the beauty of material. Unlike today, the actual design of a dress might remain virtually unchanged for several seasons.

This system also meant that at the beginning of the century fashions varied little from house to house. In order to introduce some originality into the dresses, they were often laden with trimmings of exquisite craftsmanship. Braid, beads, embroidery, lace and frills, all helped to differentiate models whose cut alone would not have distinguished one from the other. Let us assume that each client wanted to wear an exclusive dress, that Mme X could not sport the same attire as her friend Mme Y, and above all not the same as the celebrated and notorious Mlle Z, whose goings on were the talk of the town. Since it was physically impossible to design a different dress for each lady, the trimmings were varied while the basic design remained the same.

With the coming of Paul Poiret the fashion changed completely.

This great artist excelled at creation and decoration, although he was unfortunately an extremely poor businessman, reduced to poverty at the end of his life. Before setting up

on his own, he had worked at Doucet as a designer. He used to take the material in his hands, drape it softly around the figure of his mannequin, without worrying too much about how it fell. He relied on startling colors, then a snip here and there with the scissors, a few pins . . . and the dress was ready!

His models, with their bold curving lines like the dresses in a Boldini picture, were vigorous sketches, whereas the fussy costumes of his predecessors had been carefully painted miniatures. Ornaments and elaborate needlework were out; Iribe's new pink supplanted the Pompadour's pink, and lamé, showing strong Oriental influence, dethroned eighteenth-century style brocades.

The Oriental and Persian influences which inspired Poiret had been made fashionable first by Sarah Bernhardt and then by the Russian Ballet. As if artists had foreseen the cataclysmic effects of the First World War, they were busy revolutionizing everything. However, the birth of Cubism passed unnoticed by the simpering ladies of Helleu and Boldini, who were busy exchanging their petticoats for hobble skirts. The rigid stance of the corseted woman gave way to a new, delicately restrained mobility. The fashionable ideal of the odalisque or that of the sacred princess of Oriental legend was given its supreme expression by Ida Rubinstein, dressed by Bakst.

Paris in 1912 was like a harem with Paul Poiret as the powerful but kindly sultan. But Orientalism was already on the way out; the only concession which the notorious Made-moiselle Forzane made to it was her Afghan hound. Paul Iribe, Marty, Lepape, all the artists connected with Lucien Vogel's fashion magazine *La Gazette du Bon Ton*, went mad about the Directoire style, which later merged with Byzan-

tium, Bagdad, Cubism and Fauvism to compose the famous decorative arts style of 1925.

It was Madeleine Vionnet and Jeanne Lanvin who truly transformed the dressmaking profession by executing the dresses in their collections with their own hands and scissors. The model became a whole and at last skirt and bodice were cut according to the same principle. Vionnet achieved wonders in this direction, she was a genius at using her material, and she invented the famous bias cut which gave women's clothes of the period between the two wars their softly molded look. Dresses now depended on their cut.

That was the era of the great couturiers. Outstanding among them was Mlle Chanel, who dominated all the rest although she prided herself on being unable to sew a stitch. Her personality as well as her taste had style, elegance and authority. From quite different points of view, she and Madeleine Vionnet can claim to be the creators of modern fashion.

Thus today, after a long period of practically anonymous workmanship, fashion design has become the expression of a single personality: that of the head of the house. Perhaps this explains why designs and designers are discussed today more than ever before.

Back to Mme Marguerite, and the special new position I created for her. Being my own designer, I had no need for anyone to stand in for me on that side of the business, but I did need someone to look after the technical side, that is to say, to supervise all the workrooms. The *premières*, or forewomen, and their staff were capable of producing admirable and minutely detailed workmanship, but their outlook was naturally a little limited, because they lacked the necessary detachment. This detached view was to be provided by Mme Marguerite as my technical directress; armed with my sketches,

she was to supervise their execution, and correct any mistakes in the *toiles*, or muslin models, before they were actually shown to me. I would then need only to make my own personal corrections—to emphasize the style of the particular dress as I had originally conceived it.

Eventually, as my business expanded, and Mme Marguerite's responsibilities became too heavy, I had to acquire a second technical aide. Raymonde had often praised Mme Linzeler's understanding of dress design, and at the right moment she was free to come to us. I gave her a number of different jobs to do, before finally intrusting to her the task of preserving the style and quality of the models in their passage from the studio to the dresses demanded by the clients. With her calm appearance and silvery hair, she has the *premières* well under control, and she inspires confidence in the most vacillating client.

Finding the right *premières* for my workrooms was like a treasure hunt, for this was the time when the dressmakers' salons were being invaded by a rather undesirable clientele, who bought abundantly with money made on the black market. Eventually I did succeed in acquiring a staff with the right technical skill and knowledge, and I was ready to go before M. Boussac with the nucleus of my organization.

I told him frankly that the organization which I was proposing was on rather a large scale for a house of such modest size, whose clothes were to be aimed at a fairly restricted clientele. But my goal was perfection, and I needed first-class weapons to achieve it. Fortunately M. Boussac realized that he was dealing with a conscientious craftsman, not a megalomaniac.

When the Maison Christian Dior first opened, it had three workrooms in the attics of 30, avenue Montaigne, a tiny studio, a salon in which to show the dresses, a *carbine* or dress-

ing room for the mannequins, an office, and six small fitting rooms. I employed sixty people in all.

By general agreement, and to my great relief, I was not troubled with the purely administrative side of the business; this was taken over by Jacques Rouët. He had no previous experience in the fashion world, but I liked him, and felt complete confidence in him from the start. His role was to provide my castles in the air with solid foundations. When we first met, I painted a gloomy picture of the difficulties he would encounter—the inevitable disorder in which he would have to create order, the inevitable atmosphere of strife to which he would have to bring peace—a picture, in short, of all the delightful confusion which the couturier by his very nature cannot help producing.

Fortunately Jacques Rouët's innate Norman sensitivity enabled him to avoid all the unexpected pitfalls laid for him by *premières*, workers, mannequins, saleswomen, reporters and clients alike. He managed to please all these charming but exacting ladies without giving way to them too much, and at the same time appeared to enjoy his work. For months he toiled alone night and day putting in order the administrative aspects of a business which was no sooner established than it began to expand rapidly.

Once I had settled both the creative and the administrative side of my business, I had to see to its equally vital sales and publicity side. I realized that the ideal person to look after sales was Suzanne Luling, from my native Granville. Who in the fashion world doesn't know her now? Yet she really entered that world only with the opening of my house. Before that time she made a name for herself in publicity and, during the occupation, in millinery. It takes the vocabulary of the atomic age to describe her; dynamic is far too weak an adjective, and explosive is barely sufficient. She is never out of

sorts, never flags, never lets us down; she rallies the saleswomen's spirits when they are sinking, soothes the clients when they are fractious, and infects us all with her buoyant enthusiasm and common sense.

I knew that I could not altogether ignore the goddess of our age—Publicity—and I had been told about a young American named Harrison Elliott, who was anxious to live in France. As the name America is synonymous with publicity, I decided to take him on. His job—at which he excels—consisted as much in avoiding excessive publicity as in stirring it up. It is widely, and quite erroneously, believed that when the House of Christian Dior was launched, enormous sums were spent on publicity; on the contrary, in our first modest budget, not a single penny was allotted to it. I trusted in the quality of my dresses to get the House talked about. Moreover, the relative secrecy in which I chose to work aroused a whispering campaign, which was first-class free advertising. Gossip, even malicious rumors, are worth more than the most expensive publicity campaign in the world.

Another old friend from Granville came on the scene, in the shape of Serge Heftler-Louiche. Even before the formal opening of the new establishment, he had suggested that we should launch a line of Christian Dior perfumes together. His long experience in this field—and our long-standing friendship—led me to agree at once. When numerous other old friends also wanted to take part in the venture, I was pleased to discover that I was going to be one of the few prophets honored in his own country!

The first saleswoman I engaged, Nicole Riotteau, also came from Granville, where she had been like a sister to me. I was delighted to see so many old friends gather together, although a very different prospect faced us now from the picnics, fishing expeditions and croquet parties of our youth.

Many of the other saleswomen who chose to throw in their lot with me had been obliged to leave Paris and the world of fashion during the war and had not yet resumed their places in the houses which had employed them in 1939. These were our "charter members," the pillars of the new house of Christian Dior. With affection and gratitude I recall their names: Yvonne Laget, who combined personal charm with a keen business sense; Suzanne Béguin, who had been trained in the great traditions of Mainbocher; Mme Gervais, reared in the textile world, with a great knowledge about Italy; Mme de Segonzac and Mme Lancien, "society women wishing to work," who quickly became excellent professional *vendeuses*; and finally the last recruit from Granville, Mme de Nabat, who came to us from Chanel in our second season.

It is never particularly easy to find the right mannequins, and I chose a peculiarly unfortunate time to try. In despair at not being able to find the type of girl I wanted, I decided to put an advertisement in the paper. As luck would have it, I chose the exact moment when a new law was forcing certain Paris "houses" to close down, and many of their former occupants found themselves without regular employment. These ladies read my advertisement and were overjoyed; perhaps they imagined that a dressmaking establishment opening discreetly in a modest house in the avenue Montaigne must surely serve as a front for some more disreputable trade! On the appointed day, my house, where work was already under way, was literally invaded by cohorts of the most unmistakable kind. Mme Raymonde, who had the job of screening the applicants, was terrified, and wondered what on earth to do with them. I decided I must see the whole lot. From Toulouse Lautrec's type downward, I found myself interviewing every unemployed good-time girl in Paris; several of them were actually very pretty, but none of them had the sort of looks suited

to my purpose. After all, a dress designer can't forget that the first fashion magazine was named *Le Bon Genre*, (*The Proper Thing*). But I found lost amidst this horde—and completely different from the rest of them—one charming and shy young girl; she was a former secretary called Marie-Thérèse, who became one of our best mannequins.

After this unfortunate experience, I made up my mind not to risk inserting another ad in the paper, and so I gave my staff the job of finding the five girls we needed for our opening by other means. In the end my first team of mannequins consisted of Noëlle, Paule, Yolande, Lucile, Tania and Marie-Thérèse. These were the girls who modeled the New Look, and whose graceful pirouetting walk founded a new fashion in modeling. But of that, more later.

By the time I had made all these arrangements, it was July, 1946. I decided to open my house on December 15, and show my first collection in the spring of 1947. Before I left Lelong, I gave a small party for my former colleagues, which for me at least was tinged with sadness: I was bidding farewell to my years of apprenticeship. And in the very middle of the dinner I received another, crueler intimation that my carefree youth was over. I was called to the telephone to hear that my father had died suddenly, in his house at Callian in the south of France. Although I was then forty-one I felt as if I had come of age for the second time.

However impatient we may be when our parents refuse to accept the fact that we have grown up, this very weakness of theirs supports and comforts us—just how much we realize only when we are suddenly faced with their loss. I was no longer a child to anyone; it was my turn to provide comfort and support for those who were coming after me. I had to step out of the warmth and intimacy of the family circle and

welcome into the world that forbidding stranger—Christian Dior, couturier.

I certainly did my best to provide him with an attractive dwelling; and in order that he might share as much of my past as possible, I chose to decorate his place of business in the colors which had dominated my Parisian childhood—and which had since gone completely out of fashion. From 1900 to 1914 decoration à la Louis XVI was all the rage in the “new” houses in Passy: white woodwork, white enameled furniture, gray hangings, glass doors with square panes and bronze light brackets with small lamp shades. The classical, unobtrusive and very Parisian elegance of this period still survives in the public rooms of the Ritz and Plaza hotels, and I felt that it would be the ideal background for the display of my collections. I was determined that my interior decoration should not distract the eye from my clothes, which after all were to be the focal point of the proceedings.

But where, in 1946, was I to find the man capable of transforming my dreams into reality, within the limits of my modest budget? My professional decorator friends were either too uncompromising or too much in love with their own ideas to listen to mine; I did not want an authentic Louis XVI interior; I wanted a 1910 version of Louis XVI, a notion most of them would have considered complete folly.

I remembered that Victor Grandpierre, whom I had seen frequently in Cannes at the beginning of the German occupation, had often told me that he wanted to become a decorator. He was the son of the fashionable architect who built Princess de Polignac's house, Jean de Reszke's private theater, and several other masterpieces of the 1910 period. Victor Grandpierre had been brought up in the right tradition, and he did in fact prove to be the very man I was looking for.

I sent such a pressing letter to him in Cannes, where he was on vacation, that he instantly left for Paris, and set to work trying to put into practice the very confused ideas which I outlined to him. Fortunately our tastes coincided wonderfully, and we were both equally happy recapturing the magic years of our childhood. He created the "Helleu" salon of my dreams: all in white and pearl gray, looking very Parisian with its crystal chandelier, discreet light brackets and a profusion of quintas palms, so much more effective than the bizarre philodendron which is in vogue today.

After completing the salon, Victor created the tiny Boutique, which I intended to be a copy of the eighteenth-century luxury gift shops. Victor was still at work when that pace-setter for the fashionable, Christian Bérard, paid us a visit of inspection. With his beard flowing, and his little dog Jacinthe at his heels, he probed every corner of the house. We awaited his verdict with beating hearts, knowing his pronouncements on matters of taste and style were infallible. Fortunately he gave us his approval, and suggested several improvements of detail, such as covering the Boutique walls in *toile de Jouy* and lavishly scattering hatboxes, inscribed with our name, on tops of cabinets and wardrobes and in odd corners. It was an inspiration: the seemingly casual air brought the whole place to life.

Carried away by the subject of my decorative schemes, I have said nothing about my actual feelings at the moment when I presented the public with the first dresses bearing my name. I must confess that of all my collections, the very first one caused me the least effort and worry. I ran no risk of disappointing my public, because I had no public to disappoint: I was unknown and therefore nothing was expected of me. Of course I had to strive to please—but more for the sake of my own self-respect than anything else. Far from wanting to rev-

olutionize fashion, I was chiefly concerned with producing a high standard of workmanship. I wanted to be considered a good craftsman—no mean aim, it is true, since it implies both high standards and integrity—but I never guessed what an explosive quality my modest formula would prove to have in an age of compromise and *laissez faire*.

I left Lelong on December 1 and went to stay with my friends the Colles at Fleury-en-Bière, in the middle of the forest of Fontainebleau, where the ground was covered with snow. There I spent two weeks, creating and designing my first collection. Although it is true, as is often said, that fashion is breathed in with the very air of Paris, I find that at frequent intervals the peace and quiet calm of the country are absolutely essential to me, in order to reflect on the lessons learned in the city. A thousand fleeting images surged through my mind, and were speedily imprisoned by the strokes of my pencil, lest they elude me forever. One by one I weeded them out; I pondered on the surviving ideas for several days before making my final choice—which was the basis of the New Look.

Temperamentally I am reactionary, not to be confused with looking backward. We were just emerging from a poverty-stricken, parsimonious era, obsessed with ration books and clothes coupons; it was only natural that my creations should take the form of a reaction against this dearth of imagination. I suppose it was inevitable that certain perverse people should accuse me of having spent huge sums for publicity and say I designed those long full dresses, with an immense amount of material in their skirts—those dresses which were the triumph of my collection and which are still fashionable today—in response to pressure from M. Boussac and his textile interests. But it is an error to believe that fashion varies according to the dictates of commerce: I swear that any fashion inspired by considerations of this kind would have no chance of survival,

still less of development or success. In fact, M. Boussac gave me an absolutely free hand to design as I pleased.

In December, 1946, as a result of wartime uniforms, women still looked and dressed like Amazons. But I designed clothes for flower-like women, clothes with rounded shoulders, full feminine busts, and willowy waists above enormous spreading skirts. Such a fragile air can be achieved only by solid construction. In order to satisfy my love of architecture and clear-cut design, I had to employ a technique quite different from the methods then in use. I wanted my dresses to be constructed like buildings, molded to the curves of the female form, stylizing its shape. I emphasized the width of the hips, and gave the bust its true prominence; and in order to give my models more "presence," I revived the old tradition of cambric or taffeta linings.

My return to long-forgotten techniques raised a host of difficulties for, of course, none of my staff had any experience with them. As soon as I had shown my workers my designs, they applied themselves to the problem, with Mme Marguerite at their head. The work was carried out under unbelievably adverse conditions. The restricted area of my studio—formerly a boudoir—forced us to spread out into every inch of free space in order to have enough elbow room. Eventually I fled from the growing invasion of materials onto the landing, and even found myself working on the stairs. The whole house was in a fever the like of which it is difficult even to imagine. One of our key *premières* had a nervous breakdown as a result of this mad regime; she was replaced, in the midst of the battle, by a particularly talented underling, Monique, who luckily was more than adequate for the task. With Christiane, she deserves every credit for the success of the collection. They even had to make the suits, because the expert I had engaged for the purpose proved incapable of doing it.

My own thoughts and energies were concentrated on the most perfect reproduction of the ninety models I had designed. All around me—at the orders of Mme Marguerite—the *premières* and their subordinates were rediscovering or inventing the technique required for the execution of the designs intrusted to them. They were mostly complete strangers to one another, but within a few weeks they were working together like true teams.

Worn out by the triple task of organizing the business, recruiting the staff, and creating the dresses, I sometimes let myself collapse on top of the piles of materials. By now there was practically nowhere else to sit!

We all felt the tremendous strain. There were only six mannequins and the thousands of different fittings imposed such a nervous and physical strain upon them that on one occasion an extremely pretty blonde English girl fainted and fell into my arms. I thought I was clutching her securely, but she continued to slide to the floor while I found myself holding only . . . her bust! I had completely forgotten that in my desire to give prominence to this most feminine attribute, I had asked those whom nature had neglected to equip themselves with "falsies."

The materials themselves were another source of worry. In those days there was nothing like the high standard of quality we have today. I wanted silk fabrics where the yarn itself and not the woven material had been dyed—but anything which had any body to it was extremely hard to find. For years, *crêpe romain*, Georgette, muslin and clinging jersey had substituted for taffeta, faille, duchesse satin and wool taffeta.

Inexorably, the date when I was to show my collection approached. Intentionally I had not worried about publicity but trusted to a few loyal friends to get the new House of Dior talked about in Paris. The intellectual and social stand-

ing of Comte Etienne de Beaumont and Mme Larivière, and the enthusiasm which Marie-Louise Bousquet, Christian Bérard and several friends of the press, such as Mme Hélène Lazareff, Michel de Brunhoff, Paul Caldaguès, and James de Coquet, managed to communicate to others, aroused a fever of popular curiosity, from which, all at once, I recoiled in alarm. Was too much expected of me? Would I live up to such hopes?

It was only with the greatest possible reluctance that I was finally persuaded to show my dresses to my friends one evening just before their formal presentation to the public. Bérard cried out that I had achieved a miracle, and Marie-Louise Bousquet added other flattering exclamations. Being superstitious by nature, I immediately looked around for a piece of wood to touch; it all seemed a little too good to be true, and there was something ominous about it!

But my most fortunate piece of publicity was quite unplanned: *Life* magazine asked me to pose with a smile and the supposed "natural" or "inspired" expression I have had to try to assume so often since. At the time I had no idea of the far-reaching influence of an article in *Life*. Like Fortune, the goddess of Publicity often seems to smile most favorably on those who court her the least.

Up till now I had held only hasty rehearsals, in a salon cluttered up with mannequins, seamstresses, and *premières*. Now it was essential to hold something like a dress rehearsal. Nevertheless I knew such a rehearsal would give absolutely no idea of the collection as it would ultimately appear to the public. Until the opening, the true significance of the dresses would be lost on anyone except those who had actually created and sewed them. So I decided not to show the models even to the saleswomen. For them, as for the press and my future clientele, the curtain would rise on the collec-

tion for the first time on the appointed day. I have stuck to this decision ever since, in spite of all pleas to give it up. I suppose I am subconsciously trying to halt the invasion of the commercial spirit into the artistic atmosphere which means so much to me.

At last the finishing touches were put to the dresses. Now that there was no further opportunity to alter them, I suddenly felt a strange calm come over me. I had only one thing to say about my collection: I thought it "would do"; that is, I thought it would please and satisfy the clientele at which it was aimed.

Fortunately the desire to receive my guests fittingly took my mind off my actual collection. By a miracle the decoration was finished on time though, in spite of my constant nagging, the decorators had fallen behind their schedule. (As Mme Delahaye had predicted, the last bang of the last hammer was actually heard as the first visitor entered.)

I myself arrived very early on the great day and fidgeted about on the carpet which was still being tacked down. By dawn, the whole house had been in a state of uproar which made it seem more like late afternoon. Carmen Colle had spent the last hours of darkness transforming the cubbyhole which was supposed to be our Boutique into a miniature shop. In the salon, Lachaume was arranging the last vases of flowers, and I thought the curtains and hanging of gray satin made it look very elegant. In the dressing room, the mannequins were ready for the fray, and by a miracle all the models had arrived safely from the workrooms.

At 10:30 A.M. with the salons full to bursting, the first mannequin showed the first dress. Marie-Thérèse, half-dead with fright, stumbled at her first appearance, collapsed in tears, and was henceforth incapable of showing another model. Very soon, though, the entrance of every dress was

accompanied by bursts of applause. I stuffed my ears, terrified of feeling confident too soon; but a series of short bulletins from the field of battle confirmed the news that my troops—led, flag flying, by my star mannequin, the inimitable Tania—had triumphed.

Now the last dress had been shown, amid a tumult of enthusiasm, and Mme Marguerite, Mme Bricard and I stood gazing at each other in the dressing room. We were none of us able to speak. Then Raymonde came to look for us, crying with joy, in order to propel us into the big salon, where we were greeted by a salvo of applause. As long as I live, whatever triumphs I may win, nothing will ever exceed my feelings at that supreme moment.

THE NEW LOOK

VERY SOON the public, the press, and my sales ledger combined to tell me that, like M. Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who spoke prose without knowing it, I had created a "Dior" style without realizing it. The style that was universally hailed as new and original was nothing but the sincere and natural expression of a fashion I had always sought to achieve. It happened that my own inclinations coincided with the spirit or sensibility of the times. It is easy to make oneself look ridiculous by inserting philosophical reflections into a discussion of silks and satins, but since I am widely held responsible for a social trend, I may perhaps be allowed to analyze my own success. I believe it was due to the fact that I brought back the neglected art of pleasing.

Remember the years before the war. Remember the extravagance of those surrealist trimmings—in tune with the extravagance of the interior decoration of the houses—with which Mme Schiaparelli loved to decorate her clothes. An evening dress might look like a huge lobster, and a hat would be made in the shape of a shoe or a cutlet. As for the buttons, heaven knows what shape they were! It was fine just so long as it was the fashion, for fashion is always right; it has a fundamental rightness which those who create it, like those who follow it, often do not suspect.

With her great talent, Mme Schiaparelli knew how to push the frontiers of elegance until it bordered on the bizarre. Perhaps she even went a little too far, because from 1938 on,

Balenciaga, who had just opened his house, Mainbocher, and Robert Piguet (with whom I was working as a designer) initiated the return to a more classical style. The war, with its restrictions, and the *zazou* or zombie fashions I discussed earlier quickly put a stop to this natural development. But in 1947, after so many years of aberration, fashion was weary of catering to painters and poets and wanted to revert to its true function: enhancing feminine beauty.

In the opinion of the public, this was exactly the function my first collection performed. People were delighted to be faced with fashions which were European rather than exotic, clothes which were well made, and styles which for the first time in years were "becoming" and "pretty." In 1947 it was time for fashion to forsake adventure and make a temporary return to base.

You will remember I was aiming principally at a clientele of experienced buyers and habitually well-dressed women; I now had the pleasant surprise of finding that young women wanted to adopt the new fashion as well. Dominique Blanchard, in the full bloom of her youthful beauty, wore the most ostentatiously New Look dress in a play by Giraudoux (*L'Apollon de Bellac*). I liked this model so much that I christened it *Chérie*. It had a tight bodice, a tiny waist, and eighty yards of pleated white faille cascading almost to the ankles.

Saint-Germain des Près did not want to be left out, and I was delighted to find the existentialist singer, Juliette Greco, the perfect incarnation of the black sweated and trousered youth, within the precincts of a dressmaking establishment. With rare intelligence, she reconciled the demands of her own individual style with those of my designs. Thus the New Look became symbolic of youth and the future.

My first collection was successful beyond my wildest dreams.

From the moment it opened, first the press and then the buyers thronged into my salons. The crowds forced us to enlarge the landing and get rid of a charming old elevator. There was still not enough room, and so the invaders spilled out onto the staircase, and people sat on the steps in the order of arrival, as if in an amphitheater. We soon found that we were having to turn people away every day, and so we instituted a system of reserved places, which prevented people from feeling that they had been deliberately excluded as the result of a personal grudge on the part of the management. This system had another advantage, in that it enabled the public to get in and prevented would-be copyists from keeping out potential clients.

It was my first exposure to fashion reporters and professional buyers. At Piguet or Lelong, where I was only a designer, I vanished from sight once my dresses had been created; when my task was accomplished, I was off to relax in the peace and quiet of the country. Now everything was different. My astonishingly successful opening involved me in fresh responsibilities.

Of course I had several old friends among the press. I have already mentioned Michel de Brunhoff, editor of the French *Vogue*, Paul Caldaguès, and Lucien and Cosette Vogel of the *Jardin des Modes*, who had already helped me in my career. When I was a designer, I had known Alice Chavanne and Geneviève Perreau of the daily, *Figaro*. At the time when Mme Jacques Bousquet held a salon in her little house in the rue Boissière, I often went to her at homes. This was long before her period of the Place du Palais-Bourbon when her day became celebrated as "Marie-Louise's Thursday," not only in Paris, where it was a famous rallying point, but all over the world. At this time I was extremely shy and never penetrated beyond Marie-Louise's façade of unvarying

affability, which is her protection against the encroachments of the world. Later, work, the friends we had in common, as well as the joys and sorrows which we shared, enabled me to see behind the smiling mask. Marie-Louise became my great friend and ally, and just before the war she introduced me to Carmel Snow, who had intended to ask me to do designs for *Harper's Bazaar*. Everyone knows the importance of *Harper's Bazaar* and Carmel Snow's marvelous feeling for what is fashion today and what will be fashion tomorrow.

At Lelong's I had known Bettina Wilson, now Bettina Ballard, who was then fashion editor for the American *Vogue* which, under the aegis first of Condé Nast, and the editorship of wonderful Mrs. Chase and at last today of dear Jessica Daves, plays such an essential role in the world of fashion and, for that matter, in the world. *Vogue* broke its own precedent and published my photograph on their lead editorial page followed by a long report on my collection.

Then too, some time before my first show, I had also met Mr. Perkins, of the all-important American *Women's Wear Daily*. This paper finds sufficient interest in the subject of feminine apparel to distribute daily fifty pages of editorials and advertisements concerned with fashion across the whole of America! I also knew Mme Castanié, who presides over the Bible of French fashion, *Officiel de la Couture*, and Lucie Noël of the New York *Herald Tribune*. But I still had many vital contacts with the press to make, to say nothing of the all-important photographers and artists. The relationship between couturier and the press is like a love affair—a never-ending love affair, renewed each season, involving endless intrigues and reconciliations. Elliott was doing the work of ten men, and even so could not cope with the extraordinary variety of demands made upon his time by the press, and so I had to see its principal representatives myself.



Lucien Lelong



© Maywald

*Number 30,
avenue
Montaigne,
the entrance to
Christian Dior*



*I receive an
Oscar in a
gold-draped
hall in Dallas*



© Maywald

The New Look (1947)

I also began to experience directly the remorseless war which the daily papers carry on in order to reveal as early as possible the fashion secrets of the coming season to their readers. A house that is determined to get as good a press as possible also knows that premature and detailed publication of its models helps to produce imitations, and thus vulgarizes the style. So I had to learn how to fend off indiscreet questions with a wary smile. I had to extend a warm welcome to everyone, and to appear to be delighted at seeing so many of my models publicized, while at the same time I was actually furious if too many of them were. Of course the couturier to whom the magazines give too little space is not satisfied either. The general public is happily ignorant of the storm of suspicion and ill feeling to which the reproduction of a model in color on the cover of a fashion magazine can give rise. The number of models from each couturier, their position and juxtaposition in the paper—all these details are eagerly noted by his rivals. Rightly or wrongly, fashion designers are quick to suspect favoritism, and are as easily affronted as are playwrights—which is saying a lot!

Having made the necessary contacts with the press, I now had to meet the professional buyers and their backers. As the date of my opening had been comparatively late in the season, a good many of the American buyers had already left Paris, after placing all their orders. But the furore created by the first collection of a new Couture House induced them to return. I knew practically none of them personally, though of course some of their names were familiar to me—Magnin, Harry Blum, Hattie Carnegie, the celebrated team of Miss Frankau and Miss Daube from Bergdorf Goodman, Leon Schmulen who represented Bendel, and Miss Catlin, the buyer at Marshall Field.

By 1945 the buyers, who in the years immediately after the

First World War had fought tooth and nail over Chanel and Vionnet models, were ready to turn their steps once more in the direction of Paris. But times had changed. The big shops they represented now stocked a line of custom-made dresses only for the sake of prestige, and at a heavy loss. Dressmaking in the Parisian sense scarcely exists in America, where only the great talents of Mainbocher, Valentina, Charles James and a few others were able to survive and carry on the tradition. I knew therefore that we could not hope for the lavish orders by the hundred which our predecessors had enjoyed, but only for carefully planned orders, limited to the models which were either most typical of the new fashion or easiest to reproduce.

It was true that I was a French couturier, but I had to understand the needs of elegant women all over the world as well as those of my countrywomen. Thanks to both the encouragement and criticism of the buyers from abroad, I was soon designing prints for California and cottons for Rio de Janeiro, in an effort to give women of different climates and different ways of life the clothes they wanted.

Maison Dior was in a ferment day and night. Because I had made my debut late in the season, I had now to make up for lost time and sell, sell, sell, my models all day long. Fortunately a world-wide public was marching in my direction, following the vanguard of the critics. The English followed the Americans; then came the Italians, who were excellent clients, giving the lie to the absurd myth of a Franco-Italian fashion war. The Belgians, the Swiss and the Scandinavians came in their wake. A little while after came the South Americans, the Australians, and several seasons later, the Germans and the Japanese.

Our saleswomen were up to their ears in work, for now private clients were swelling the throng of indefatigable professionals, and there was danger of a complete bottleneck in

the workrooms. I decided to open two more at once, and M. Boussac and I also committed ourselves to the construction of a new seven-story building of workrooms in spite of the difficulties. Our principal problem was finding a site on which to build, and there seemed nothing for it but to tear down old stables. This was probably the first time in the career of this great horse lover that he had ever consented to such a sacrilege!

Where was the small exclusive house of my dreams now? I was slightly overcome by the consequences of my sudden rise to fame, and inclined to regret the transformation of my original modest conception into something so much vaster. All the same, I was human enough to enjoy being a success; and after all, presumably the aim of anyone's labors is to succeed, so I had no legitimate grievance. I hasten to say that my pleasure arose from the fact that my dresses were being appreciated by the public, and the hard work of the little community on the avenue Montaigne was therefore rewarded. I disliked intensely the other side of the picture; the inevitable gossip, true or untrue, and the curious whispers which my presence aroused whenever I was recognized in public.

It was Christian Bérard who provided the fitting climax of my triumphant first season, in the course of a dinner given by Marie-Louise Bosquet. Christian had done a pastel drawing of the house on the avenue Montaigne, which I thenceforth had reproduced on everything from Christmas cards to the programs of the collection. At the dinner, he made a wonderful improvised toast to me, which summed up all the vigor of his own philosophy of life.

"My dear Christian," he concluded, "savor this moment of happiness well, for it is unique in your career. Never again will success come to you so easily; for already tomorrow be-

gins the anguish of living up to, and if possible, surpassing yourself."

At the time I listened to his words without taking in their meaning. The poison of success had not yet had time to work in my veins. But very soon Bérard was to be proved right, as usual.

At last I was free to take a vacation to let mind and body recover from the exhausting effects of the past few months. I set off for Touraine, rejoicing in my liberty. Although this was 1947, France had taken a long time to lick her wounds and it still seemed like wartime in the country. The surface of the roads, broken by tanks, had not yet been mended. I am hopelessly bored by everything mechanical, so I have never learned to drive. As I had never been rich enough to employ a chauffeur, I had never had a car of my own. Since in those days cars were still scarce, I was fortunate that Suzanne Luling offered to lend me her gallant little Simca, and that a friend of mine suggested that he would drive me. The Simca had only escaped being requisitioned by both French and Germans through a series of cunning stratagems. Now it was brought proudly out of retirement; that is to say, it got as far as the garage door. It then occurred to me that this wonder car had possibly been spared because it was not worth a penny to anyone. With its worn tires and asthmatic engine, it advanced painfully in a series of noisy jerks and jolts. Every fifty miles we came to a standstill. There was a puncture in one of the tires, so the tube had to be patched and re-inflated. Off we went again, only to find two hours later that there had been another puncture, and the same procedure was in order. All the same, I felt I was traveling along in a triumphal chariot.

In this manner, we did eventually reach Touraine, where for a month I lived on the fat of the land. I was thankful to

find that my face was unknown, and that I was to be spared the autograph books, in which I could never think of anything to write. I toured the small hotels of the district, enjoying the old-fashioned cooking which, in spite of food shortages, acquitted itself with honor. After so many lean years, I had practically forgotten what it felt like to live well.

It was a wonderful holiday; I felt that these little towns, these country churches and well-tended gardens, even the smell of simmering stew, epitomized the France I loved. I went for long walks and in the evenings either played patience or read my favorite volumes of historical memoirs. But every night I put through a call to Paris, to keep in touch with what had happened during the day, and to follow the dizzy rise of my profits. I suppose my Norman blood prevents my ever really forgetting completely about my work.

Even the pleasantest of vacations must come to an end sometime. The Simca breathed its last in full view of the church tower at Dourdan, so I called Paris to hire a car.

Christian Dior, the public figure, now returned to the scene. He was photographed from every angle. I reflected philosophically that this was the price of fame. But apart from my dislike of the whole business, I could not help thinking that I cut a sorry figure—a well-fed gentleman in the Parisian's favorite neutral-colored suit—compared with the glamorous, not to say dandified, couturier of the popular imagination.

I wondered if I ought to transform myself in order not to disappoint my public. Perhaps I should go on a diet, and renounce not only *Gourmandise* but everything else which made life worth living.

I splashed out timidly with a flower in my buttonhole. I ordered several more suits from my tailor, put myself in the hands of a masseur, and then almost immediately gave up

the whole project. I decided that the gap between imagination and reality was too wide. With relief I sank back into my own shell, which had come to fit me very comfortably after so many years.

I was in the midst of working for my second collection (the winter collection, to be presented in July) when I received a letter from the great American store, Neiman-Marcus, inviting me to come to Dallas, Texas, to receive an Oscar. The very idea of such a journey, to what sounded like the ends of the earth, terrified me, and my first instinct was to refuse at once. But the idea of getting to know America was too tempting to be resisted. My biggest buyers were Americans, and I wanted to see the American women who were wearing my clothes, in their natural surroundings. Rereading the letter, I discovered that the Oscar had been instituted during the war and this was the first time it had been awarded to a French couturier. My very first collection had won me this honor.

Curiosity and pride alone would not have been enough to send me across the Atlantic. What really spurred me on was the feeling that it was the revival of French fashions being honored in my name. It was my duty to reaffirm the ancient supremacy of Paris in the field of fashion, and to represent both my country and my profession.

I could not set off until I had presented my second collection, and so I set to work with renewed energy. The anxiety which Bérard had prophesied gnawed at me, but far from having a paralyzing effect, it inspired me to greater heights. It was a crazy collection of immensely wide, immensely long skirts, the New Look pushed to extremes. Dresses took up a fantastic yardage of material, and this time went right down to the ankles. Girls could safely feel that they had all the trappings of a fairy tale princess. A golden age seemed to

have come again. The war was over and no one could foresee what was to follow. What did the weight of my sumptuous materials, my heavy velvets and brocades, matter? When hearts were light, mere fabrics could not weigh the body down. Abundance was still too novel for there to be any affectation of simplicity.

We were dizzy with success and nearly involved ourselves in a catastrophe for a totally unexpected reason. There was one simple pink wool dress in the collection, called "Bon-bon," cut according to the new technique of the corolla. This dress created a sensation, partly because it was so pretty, but also, and more to the point, because a mistake had been made in working out the price and it was set at a figure considerably less than what it cost us to make. Our clients, of course, made no mistake. They knew a bargain when they saw one. Ruin was just around the corner! Fortunately the damage was reparable, and our business was not rocked to its foundations.

I often smile when I think of those who at this time talked about the Maison Christian Dior as if it were an established Parisian attraction, like the Eiffel Tower or the Cancan, forgetting that the firm was exactly six months old.

All this took place in the year of grace 1947. The year 1937 had danced in the aigrettes and poufs of Schiaparelli, on top of a grumbling volcano. Ten years later, people were dancing in the New Look on a volcano extinguished, we hoped, forever. The post war spirit inspired a series of balls. Christian Bérard organized the "Panache Ball" where the most fashionable and beautiful heads in the world were decorated with every type of feather—aigrette, bird of paradise, and ostrich plume. The "Ball of the Birds" followed, where gorgeously feathered masks lent an air of mystery to a pretty face.

Comte Etienne de Beaumont wanted to revive his parties, which had been famous before the war. He reopened the doors of his music room for a "Ball of Kings," at which every celebrity in Paris appeared beneath a cardboard crown, from King Dagobert to the Queens of Spades and Hearts, not to mention Marie Antoinette and the Queen of Sheba. Marie-Laure de Noailles took up the challenge and at Trou-sur-Lune the ephemeral royalties transformed themselves into characters typical of the famous French comedian, Jacques Tati. Marie-Louise Bousquet; Arturo Lopez-Willshaw; the American Ambassador, Mr. David Bruce, and his beautiful wife, and I got together and went as owners of a bistro.

As if possessed by a frenzy, everybody wanted to give a ball for a particular charity, or for his friends—in Paris, in the country, on the Eiffel Tower, aboard a boat on the Seine, any place where it was a novelty to dance. As our friends from abroad poured in to visit us, Paris became cosmopolitan once more. Arturo Lopez-Willshaw and his wife, who are as Parisian as if they had been born there, reopened their beautiful house in Neuilly. New faces emerged. A young Portuguese had the charming idea of hiring the Deligny swimming pool, which floats on the Seine, in order to present a Venetian entertainment for his guests. Banked with flowers, the swimming pool turned into a dream lake. The glow of the candles and the ingenious wooden Spanish-Moroccan façades reminded me of the Palace of the Doges, while the costumed guests passing in and out of the airy arcades were like characters of the *Opéra-Comique*.

This dance at Deligny was a forerunner of the celebrated ball Charles de Bestegui was to give several years later at Venice, in his wonderful Palazzo Labia. This was the most marvelous spectacle I have ever seen, or ever hope to see. The splendor of the costumes rivaled the rich attire of the

figures in the Tiepolo frescoes on the walls. An enormous crowd gathered around the palace, and its acclamations mingled with the greetings of the guests. The magic of an Italian midsummer night held us in its timeless spell.

How can the extravagance of big parties be justified? In an age when it is fashionable to affect scorn for luxury and large-scale entertainments, I shall not disguise the fact that the Bestegui Ball is a memory which I am proud to have. Parties like this are genuine works of art; people may be irritated by the very fact that they are on such a grand scale, but nevertheless they are desirable and actually important even in the history of our time, because they produce an authentic sense of popular enjoyment.

Europe was tired of dropping bombs and now only wanted to set off fireworks. This new release of *joie de vivre* never succeeded in equalling the frenzies of 1920, which I knew only by hearsay, since I was too young to take part in them. But it was reassuring to find that the vulgar parties given by black-marketeers were being gradually superseded by the more elegant entertainments of smart society. The Maison Christian Dior profited from this wave of optimism and the return of an ideal of civilized happiness.

I insist on using the word happiness. I believe Alphonse Daudet once wrote that he wanted his books to make him a "merchant of happiness." In my modest way I pursue the same aim. My first creations had names like "Love," "Tenderness," and "Happiness." Women have instinctively understood that I dream of making them not only more beautiful but also happier. That is why they have rewarded me with their patronage.

There was only one note of melancholy in my paean of gratitude. I had to renounce a whole side of my life which had been very dear to me. Henceforth I had to devote myself

in earnest to the role of Christian Dior, couturier. I rehearsed it with some success during that brilliant season in Paris, before the fateful moment came when I had to take my new personality on tour.

AN INNOCENT ABROAD
IN THE U.S.A.

IN SPITE of the scorn my family had poured on the fortune-teller's prophecy that I would travel widely, it had already come true to a certain extent before 1947. But although I had even gone as far afield as Russia (in 1931), I had never left the confines of Europe. To reach Dallas, Texas, I had to cross the ocean and enter the New World.

I decided to do the thing thoroughly and make a complete tour of the United States. It may not sound like a particularly bold venture in these days when people travel huge distances so casually, but the thought of it filled me with trepidation. For one thing, although I was beginning to know my role of couturier by heart, I knew very little about this new stage on which I should have to play it. I had read so many different things about America by so many different people that I no longer knew whom or what to believe—although of course this very mystery filled me with excitement.

Somewhere behind a composite façade of skyscrapers, the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, gasoline pumps, wide dusty deserts, and something called the "Deep South" (created in my mind by films, magazines, and picture postcards) lay the real America. What would it be like? My ears rang with slogans: "Hollywood with its film producers and stars is not America," "The Americans who come to Europe are not the real Americans." Old Paris friends, like the poet Archibald MacLeish and the musician and critic Virgil Thomson,

whose word is law in New York, were not characteristic American types either. I was told that the American millionaires I might have met were anachronisms and belonged to the age of *Gone With the Wind*. Nor could the G.I.'s that liberated us be regarded as true Americans, because everybody knows that men in uniform are never quite themselves.

I gradually formed a picture of a gigantic country inhabited by an unknown race. It was scarcely reassuring! So in order to rally my spirits, I began to dwell on a series of deliberately old-fashioned notions that, I felt, could scarcely lead to disappointment. I rejected what little I knew of Steinbeck or Hemingway in favor of the early films of Charlie Chaplin, Paul Muni's gangsters, Pearl White and Mary Pickford; I even went back to James Fenimore Cooper in search of a more soothing America.

With this intellectual armor to protect me I bade my friends good-by, as if I were going on an arctic expedition, and embarked on the *Queen Elizabeth* at the beginning of September with a heavy heart, encumbered, of course, with a thousand absolutely essential suitcases.

It was the first time I had ever made a trip on an ocean liner, and as the *Queen Elizabeth* lay in the docks at Cherbourg, she seemed to me more imposing than Mont Blanc itself. But in spite of the hideous luxury she shares with all other big ships, the *Queen Elizabeth* became instantly very agreeable to me. I had a spacious cabin and a pleasant steward. Besides, an English ship is England itself, and there is no other country in the world, outside my own, whose way of life I like so much. I love English traditions, English politeness, English architecture, I even love English cooking! I dote on Yorkshire pudding, mince pies, stuffed chicken, and above all I worship the English breakfast of tea, porridge, eggs and bacon.

It was in fact by far the most agreeable sea crossing I have ever made. Among the passengers were Iva Patcévitch, publisher of *Vogue*, Alex Liberman, *Vogue's* art director, and Bettina Ballard; I knew none of them very well when we set off nor did I know what good friends of mine they and *Vogue* would become. But by the time we reached New York we were already good friends, and I could not have hoped for a nicer quartet to introduce me to America. In such pleasant company my habitual shyness melted and the hours slipped by.

I found I had harbored a completely erroneous impression of life aboard an ocean liner. Here were no haughty, elusive cosmopolitan beauties making fleeting appearances in the evening, draped in sables. It is true that horse racing and bingo were played every evening in the lounge (beneath a portrait of the Queen by the most official of her official painters), but the people who played, although undoubtedly rich, were neither young nor smart. As a set, they went early to bed, and the only concessions they made to the traditional grandeur of the *Queen Elizabeth* were their dinner jackets and evening dresses.

I for one did not grumble at this lack of the gala spirit; it left our little group free for a delightful existence of sunbathing, bridge, and gossip that inevitably centered around New York. But to all my questions, the city of New York itself gave the best answer—when it appeared on the horizon at dawn of the fifth day, radiant in the glory of its Indian summer.

Little by little the first rock of another world—the New World—rose out of the sea. At the top of the rock stood an enormous city, its base still shrouded in darkness, but its summit adorned with numerous towers of Babel, already gilded by the morning sun. The zest for life and the self-

confidence of the whole nation were perfectly conveyed by those thousand upward-pointing obelisks. Carried away by my enthusiasm, I completely forgot the ancient continent of my birth; how far away now seemed the airy structure of my own Eiffel Tower!

I was recalled to a sense of reality—and everyday problems such as luggage, tickets and visa—by the sirens which announced disembarkation. Men in uniform, from park attendants to Swiss Guards, have always inspired me with mingled respect and fear. In vain I reminded myself that my innocence had been established a dozen times; I still faced the immigration authorities with all the guilt of a stowaway, and my head buzzing with stories of their notorious severity. I remembered the absurd questions I had been asked in Paris, how I had had my fingerprints taken and been forced to swear on oath that I was not a Communist. It was true that I nourished no sinister designs against America or her President—but one never knows.

Having searched my pockets for my passport, customs declaration, disembarkation card, luggage checks and vaccination certificate, having found and lost them again several times, having finally managed to grasp the whole lot in my hands, and having discovered the right line, in which I sat down and stood up twenty-five times in order to advance one yard, I ended up at last with a beating heart in front of an ominously silent gentleman with gold spectacles, who waved me politely to my twenty-sixth seat. He took my papers, went through innumerable long lists, devoted himself to a minute checking of every conceivable detail, and after asking me how long I intended to spend in America, finally observed, with a knowing wink:

“Well, so you’re the designer. What about the skirt length?”

I had felt sure that I should leave the ship shrouded in anonymity and so I was astonished to discover that the immigration authorities were so keenly interested in the length of skirts. I replied in rather bad English that after all I had not made skirts as long as all that, and rose to my feet, overjoyed at having escaped so easily. The New Look had proved an excellent passport for its inventor.

I now began to run after my suitcases, as though the stewards who were carrying them intended to throw them into the sea. I lost my way in the long corridors, and felt so totally bewildered that when several microphones started to boom out my name, far from being alarmed, I heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank heaven," I cried—on hearing these enormous echoing cries of "Dior, Dior,"—"they've found me at last."

My satisfaction was short-lived. Once spied and identified, I found myself hustled into the grillroom, without having the least idea of what was going on, and faced with an impromptu press conference. It was my first experience of this ghastly ordeal, to which I have since become accustomed. It is like being a prisoner in the dock before a terrible tribunal, while the courtroom is filled with flash bulbs firing at you before you can even say a word. On this occasion I faced the grave charge of wishing to conceal the sacrosanct legs of the American female, and I had to defend myself on the spot. It seemed that the immigration officer's wink had been anything but benevolent! Fortunately my native Norman caution got me out of a tight corner. Pretending to search for words in my halting English, I looked desperately for a sympathetic face to rescue me. At that very moment, as in all the best melodramas, a late arrival pushed his way through the crowd and advanced toward me with open arms.

This savior, sent from heaven at the critical moment, was

none other than Nicolas Bongard, a friend of twenty years' standing, who had married a charming American girl and settled in New York after the war, a partner with Jean Schlumberger in the opening of an exclusive jewelry business. He knew his America and foresaw what was in store for me; braving the rules, he had climbed aboard the boat to come to my assistance. Thus strengthened, I took heart, and began to reply to the bombardment of questions.

My two days in New York were spent in a state of continuous wonder. The electric atmosphere of the city kept me constantly on the go and I tried to keep my eyes wide open the whole time, in order to miss nothing of so striking a spectacle. I have already said that mechanical things are a closed book to me. In New York everything was mechanical, and I had to get used to the fact and adapt myself to it.

The warmth of the American welcome is not a myth. Like all foreigners, I basked in it; warmth and friendship are two things without which I cannot live. Very soon I established close ties with Mrs. Engel, who, at the suggestion of mutual friends, delightfully took charge of me and became my mentor. Later she was to play an extremely important role in the life of Christian Dior—New York. I also met Edward Marcus, one of the partners of the firm which had been responsible for my invitation. Soon both he and his wife became my good friends.

Finally, I set off for Dallas. I had no idea what to expect of a city answering to such a romantic name. In fact, Dallas is a massive block of skyscrapers, grouped around a central square, and so the church, the town hall, the school and the hotel are situated exactly as they would be in a French village, except that the height of everything is multiplied twenty or thirty times. These skyscrapers are occupied by banks and offices of all sorts (including, of course, those of many oil

companies). Then there are the residential districts, with charming houses built in an intimate architectural style, green lawns, and well-tended gardens.

But when one examines the structure of Dallas seriously, one realizes that its real singularity consists in the fact that it is built around one elegant store, one of the most luxurious in the United States. This extraordinary establishment, which owes its foundation to the inspired partnership of Neiman-Marcus, offers the most expensive things in the world to the wealthiest buyers. European readers may perhaps be surprised to learn that the Neiman-Marcus store is enough to make Dallas famous not only in the four corners of the United States but also throughout the world.

I did not arrive in Dallas alone. I had a French mentor with me, André Janney, who had lived many years in America. His task was to smooth both my journey and my stay in Dallas. First of all he told me that the celebrated Hollywood dress designer, Irene, and the famous Italian shoemaker, Salvatore Ferragamo, would be receiving Oscars at the same time as I. The idea of a trio of Oscar winners did something to calm my apprehension. But Janney then proceeded to double my fears by telling me that I would receive the prize on a gilded platform in front of 3,000 people. My Oscar would be a silver plaque mounted on ebony, and horrors, when I received it I would have to make a short speech in English! It was extremely hot in Dallas, but when I heard this news I went cold all over.

That night I slept very badly. The next day, among other novelties, I encountered for the first time what turned out to be my daily menu during the course of my tour: piles of sandwiches, cold turkey and Virginia ham—which luckily I happened to like very much—the whole meal gulped while standing and washed down, by me at least, with orange juice (there

was no hope of a glass of wine, and I detest both ice water and cold milk).

At nine o'clock in the evening I finally found myself sitting down, but alas, on the famous gilded platform, in front of the aforesaid 3,000 spectators. The central hall of Neiman-Marcus was hung with gold lamé and transformed into a garden of the Hesperides by a grove of orange trees, complete with fruit. As the orchestra struck up, mannequins wearing my dresses started to file past. But I was exhausted. I had spent the afternoon trying to convince my questioners that the principal attraction and novelty of the evening dresses consisted of the conspicuous bosom. Since Marilyn Monroe had not yet become famous, everyone had looked at me as if I had committed a terrible faux pas.

By now the fatal moment of the presentation of the Oscar was almost upon me. My fellow prize winners had already been honored; I had been saved till last, as a particularly choice victim. Suddenly, just as M. Ferragamo was receiving his silver plaque, my terror gave place to inspiration. After all, what was expected of me? Simply to be, or play the part of, an eccentric Parisian couturier abroad. Having always enjoyed taking part in charades, I decided that this evening I was going to impersonate a certain character called Christian Dior, a fashion designer who couldn't speak a word of English and yet had to improvise a speech in this language. The room burst into roars of laughter, and with relief I descended from the platform amidst much applause. I had not disappointed my public, and my improvised theatrical verve was to last me throughout my tour.

I left Dallas with many feelings of regret. By their personal kindness the Marcus family had managed to transform an official visit into an unofficial, friendly one. It is delightfully

American to pass naturally from the realm of business contacts to that of warmhearted friendliness.

I now prepared myself to enter a considerably more familiar world: California, the earthly paradise of which all Americans, and many Europeans, dream. I expected a perpetually warm climate, a perpetually shining sun, a profusion of trees, flowers, and wide sandy beaches, washed by the Pacific—in fact, a super-Riviera. I also prepared myself for Los Angeles and Beverly Hills, where motion-picture stars live in dream-like luxury. To this mental picture I added the vivid Mediterranean coloring of Cannes and Portofino. However, on my way to this artificial Eden, Arizona broke into my sight, Arizona with the savage reality which defied anything I had imagined: great canyons, moonlit mountains, petrified forests. It reminded me of the pictures of Salvador Dali; there were the same ranges of cliffs painted by the sun in every color in the prism and looking like frozen rainbows.

After this inspired interval, Los Angeles and the Pacific Coast were the complete opposite of what I had expected. The ocean was gray, not blue, with chains of oil wells, and houses along its shores as mediocre as those bordering the English Channel. As for Los Angeles, so charmingly named, I can honestly say that it would be impossible for any Frenchman used to structures and towns built according to some sort of plan not to be appalled by the appearance of this gigantic conglomeration of buildings, occupying 500 square miles, about which the inhabitants themselves often make jokes.

But if Los Angeles was not what Christian Dior had been expecting, Los Angeles had certainly been expecting Christian Dior—for a press conference, endless visits to shops, lethal cocktail parties, buffet lunches, fashion shows, and even a shower of anonymous letters, written by the enemies of the

"liberated bosom," rounded hips, long skirts, in short of the New Look. Imperturbably, I faced a battery of flash bulbs, smiled, shook hands, drank orange juice and increased my self-confidence in the role which I had recently created for myself at Dallas.

By contrast I found Beverly Hills more peaceful than I had hoped; for the movie stars were mostly away on vacation. Charming hosts, some of whom had been recommended to me by Lady Mendl, gave me a series of warm welcomes in their delightful homes. I found René and Bronia Clair again, and realized that they had brought all the atmosphere of distant France with them. I discovered real friends—a rare piece of good luck—in Grover and Jeanne Magnin. I was taken to see the film studios of Twentieth Century-Fox, which fascinated me. But what delighted me most was the California countryside. Stretches of green velvet embroidered with orange and lemon trees—it had all the mixed riches of Normandy and the area around Naples, seen in the clear light of the Basque coast.

West Coast Americans, like the German Swiss, seem to be divided into two camps. In Switzerland there are the enthusiasts of Basel and those of Zurich; the Americans divide into the devotees of San Francisco and those of Los Angeles. Without wanting to hurt my friends in Los Angeles, I must admit I prefer San Francisco. This city, with the pink, pale green and yellow houses that dot its hills, the water on three sides and the longest of bridges decorating its bay, offers in a single bouquet the charms of Naples, Istanbul, China and Luna Park. It owes this last characteristic to its streets, forty-five degree sheer precipices which have steps as pavements and cable cars as trolleys. Cars ascend or descend the streets as if they were roller coasters. Did I say that the Luna Park aspect is the one which I liked least of all? Roller coasters

and shoot-the-chutes were my childhood terrors, but San Francisco is so beautiful that I finished by loving even the memory of the dizziness of my early years. However, I dread thinking what a real winter would be like here. Happily, the temperature all year long is almost "air-conditioned," cool and not too dry.

An enormous crowd of people greeted me at the airport. I also found scores of invitations waiting for me, which left me with the real problem of trying to please everyone. I was given a gold Key to the City at one club, while a number of people waited at another club and were justly annoyed at my failure to turn up for the same ceremony.

But the easygoing happy atmosphere of San Francisco made it seem simple to sort out the various confusions. Quickly but conscientiously I got through all the functions imposed on me either by courtesy or commercial obligation. Then, with a feeling of liberation, I set out to explore the city from top to bottom.

I could imagine I was Chinese as I wandered through the streets of Chinatown, streets decked with signs as alluring as they were incomprehensible. The shops revealed curiosities which should have graced the cupboard of an eighteenth-century collector: mushrooms, wizards' eggs, shark fins, mandrake roots—everything for the amateur alchemist! Then I was reincarnated as a Spanish conquistador in the squares in front of the yellow and green hilltop churches, as a Neapolitan when I wandered through the dock districts, and finally once more as a Frenchman when at the extreme point of the bay I saw Corots and Nattiers exhibited in an exact replica of the Hall of the Legion of Honor, on whose façade are inscribed the words *Honneur et Patrie*.

San Francisco was later to afford me another pleasure. Not

long after my regrettably short visit, French friends told me that a whole case in the city's museum of art and history contains a permanent exhibition of several of my models.

From San Francisco I went by train to Chicago. What a train! The Pullmans were as comfortable as the apartments of a luxury hotel, but as depressing as hospital wards; they also had the irritating quality of being too light in weight, so that they swayed and "danced" without stopping. As I bumped and jolted through the splendors of the western scenery, I prepared for the quite different atmosphere of Chicago, familiar to me from gangster films, and also for the inevitable press conference. Fortunately I had come to see the amusing side of these cross-examinations, which force you to furnish an explanation for even the most lightly taken decisions of your past. The ingenuous brutality of some of these conferences has given birth to a particular canon of etiquette. The rule of the game is that you must reply along the lines expected by your interviewers, without offending them. At the slightest sign of difficulty, you change the subject. The art lies in either talking or acting in such a way as to provide amusement.

The questions are the same the world over. They ask you: "Are the women here the most beautiful in the world?" And I invariably reply yes, but French women aren't at all bad either.

"What is the right length for skirt? What will be the trend of your next collection?"

To this question I reply very innocently that I haven't the least idea—which is generally true, and even if it isn't it gives me an excellent excuse for keeping silent.

In the train which bore me toward Chicago, I rehearsed my jokes, and practiced my expressions and gestures. Thus prepared, I awaited the entry to the station without a great deal of anxiety. Imagine how surprised I was to see the same

anxiety from which I had just been liberated stamped on the faces of those about to interview me. They hustled me toward the waiting cars. It was only when the doors were closed that my guards gave a sigh of relief, as if we had all escaped assassination. They then explained to me that, because the train had been late, I had to dress in a hurry in order to go to the inevitable fashion show, which had already begun.

As Americans, contrary to their reputation, are the least hurried people in the world, I was at a loss to understand this mad haste. It was only when I arrived at the reception that I understood. The hall—as, no doubt, the station also—was literally patrolled by embattled housewives brandishing placards bearing the words: “Down with the New Look,” “Burn Monsieur Dior,” “Christian Dior, Go home.”

In order to escape these furies, I, the new Orpheus, had somehow to pass through them unobserved. My guard of honor wanted to disguise me; but their precautions were needless. My own phlegmatic appearance was the best possible protection. I do not know what sort of mental image my pickets had formed of the hated Dior; but they were probably on the lookout for a pin-up boy. At any rate, I passed through the hall without question, and my stolid Norman looks aroused not the faintest breath of curiosity. I felt almost disappointed!

I was able to wander about Chicago quite freely, when I had some leisure time, certain that I would not be recognized. At the risk of disagreeing with New York or Boston intellectuals and the majority of Europeans who visit the U. S., I must openly admit my taste for this lusty and paradoxical city where the most outrageous luxury exists side by side with the most disturbing poverty. Behind the façade of hotels, skyscrapers, banks, and private houses along the shores of Lake Michigan, one discovers the true face of Chicago, the only American city

which really resembles the films and novels it has inspired. The fire escapes running down the sides of the buildings, the viaducts, the neon signs in every color, the dusty windows, the heterogeneous crowds in the streets, the various districts—Greeks, Polish, Lithuanian and Hungarian—above all, the thin layer of ashes which the smokestacks of the packing houses pour out over everything: this is America, the most authentic expression of the national spirit.

But in spite of its sinister reputation, Chicago is one of the most poetic cities in the world. Among other things, it possesses a museum where one can admire the best collection of Impressionist pictures in the world, masterpieces that a Frenchman is sad to see exiled, as it were, from the country they portray. The inertia of our own museums, the cupidity of art dealers and lack of public appreciation have resulted in our being obliged to admire them far from their native land.

Washington, city of diplomats, followed the "city of gangsters." How could I fail to admire the vistas, reminiscent of Versailles, which are in fact the work of a Frenchman's hand? European and American visitors generally concur in finding the Washington atmosphere stiff and forbidding. Personally, because of the great kindness of the French Ambassador, M. Bonnet, and of Mme Bonnet, I found a welcome which was anything but cold. It is always amusing for any irreverent spectator to observe the diplomatic world. Among other things, I greatly appreciated the personalities of the famous Washington hostesses, whose receptions fill the gossip columns of the entire United States. These ladies are the real queens in a country which still prides itself on being the most democratic of republics.

From the marble Palladian porticoes of Washington to the frame porches of Boston, I had the experience of crossing New England, the most ancient and deeply civilized part

of America. In Boston I found again that English way of life which I love, and I spent a great deal of time in its remarkable museums and universities. French students, condemned to haunt deliberately austere institutions, would find it difficult to imagine such comfort and beauty. But do such magnificent campuses prepare the young for all the rigors of the world in which we live?

Finally I returned to New York, the beginning and end of my journey. At the start, I had only passed through it, and knew no more of the city than the average American who drives hastily through Paris knows that city. I enjoyed looking up many of my old friends, who had gone there during the war and then decided to make it their home. They taught me to know, understand and love New York, the city to which I have since returned twenty times, and which is now almost as much home to me as Paris.

The first discovery I made was that New York—one of the great cities of the world—is in fact nothing but a village. It is also a village with strict geographical limits consisting of twenty streets, within which there are five hotels, three restaurants and four night clubs. There, and there only, will you be certain to meet one of the 500 people who “are New York.” And as traffic congestion precludes the use of cars, you will meet these people every day strolling along the sidewalk, exactly as one parades along the boulevards in Paris. If you stray far from Fifth and Park Avenues, you leave the village. You risk losing yourself in Harlem, Downtown, or on the West Side—the section where nobody is supposed to live, which is a pity, as it contains some charming houses. Of course, there is absolutely no question of living in Brooklyn; it seems much farther away than Connecticut or Long Island, which are actually far more distant but definitely acceptable residential areas for “café society.”

Café society in New York is as exclusive as an English club. Its members frequent the five hotels, three restaurants and four night clubs mentioned above. They see only one another, and never go outside the territory bounded East and West by the East River and Fifth Avenue, and South and North by Forty-fifth and Eightieth Streets. These boundaries are in fact so precisely defined that I apologize if I have given them inaccurately, having no memory for numbers. More strictly inclosed within its boundaries than the Emperor of China in his Forbidden City or the Pope in the Vatican, café society lives in the shadow of its skyscrapers just as French villagers live in the shadow of the trees of their market square. The financier can go every day to Wall Street; the smart women can depart every week end for Long Island or can even go to Europe, but their private life cannot be lived anywhere except within these sacred limits. The result of this fidelity is that one always finds the same people in the same places. You get used to them, and they get used to you, and once you have mastered the tribal pass words, you have the agreeable sensation of "belonging."

Outside this delightful contact with café society, I continued to investigate the American way of life, with which I feel every member of the twentieth century should be acquainted. As my stay reached its end I felt a confused but nevertheless tenacious desire to return some day to this Eldorado, to achieve something there and win a place for myself. Mixed with this feeling was the vague wish—common to many Europeans in 1947—to plant one foot in America, while keeping the other in the Old World. With time I have discovered that it would be impossible for me to live permanently away from my own country, but the pleasure of revisiting New York remains always as great as ever.

The French often picture New York as a conglomeration

of skyscrapers and streets meeting at right angles. In truth the geometry of the town is of infinite variety, but it is a spatial or solid rather than a plane geometry. The most striking feature of the city is the juxtaposition of very high buildings with very low ones, of luxurious quarters with slums. This juxtaposition, which does not seem to worry anybody, is effected with no feeling of transition. My passion for antique furniture took me into the antique district, and then I wanted to explore Greenwich Village, which is the New York equivalent of Montmartre and Montparnasse. Strolling about the streets often took me to the West Side and one Sunday morning I even reached Wall Street, a great silent and deserted nave, looking in the Sabbath calm like a sunken cathedral. As New York taxis are hard to get, especially when it is raining, one goes farther on foot there than in any other city in the world.

Now I come to the question I have been asked a thousand times, and one which I know perfectly well my readers are waiting for me to answer: "What do you think of American women?"

My answer will probably both surprise and disappoint them. The blond, slim, tall women shown to us by Hollywood are in reality no different from their European sisters. There are small ones as well as tall, brunettes as well as blonds. The distinction between them is the care, the grooming of the American woman, which is always meticulous. In the years immediately after the war, American women enjoyed singular advantages which now are no longer theirs alone: they had all the brilliance of a new penny. Their clothes, hair, nails and shoes are all impeccable. This is true of all classes of society from the millionaire down to the elevator operator.

I should have been glad to see my compatriots emulate

some of this impeccability, but I must at the same time admit that in the end there was something uniform about it. Aside from this mild criticism, let me say that the American's quest for beauty is successful. A bit more nature and less art, if you please, and they will attain perfection. Meanwhile, in 1947, all the resources of a rich and variegated collection of ready-made clothes were mobilized in defense of individuality, often with a regrettable lack of discernment. A hat bought here, a coat there, a dress somewhere else—pretty enough in themselves—make up an outfit perhaps, but not an *ensemble*. I realize that the clear vibrant air of New York justified to some extent these bold experiments in color which started on the paint work of the cars, continued onto the dresses of their passengers, or the ties of the men. A certain taste for exaggeration marred the American woman's innate *chic*.

But times have changed. Just as France has renounced the follies of the *zazou* style, so America has modified its exaggeration. And French women now dress with more care, and benefit from a greater variety of clothing. America has had its influence on Europe and vice versa; these two quarters of the world are too much sisters under the skin to endure separation for long without harm. So, with the years, the face of New York has changed. A taste for subtle colors, the smartest of all tastes, has developed.

What alarmed me most in the course of my stay in the United States was the habit of spending enormous sums of money in order to achieve so little real luxury. America represents the triumph of quantity over quality. Mass production triumphs; men and women both prefer to buy a multitude of mediocre things rather than a smaller number, carefully chosen. The American woman, faithful to the ideal of optimism which the United States seems to have made its rule of life, spends money entirely in order to gratify the collective

need to buy. She prefers three new dresses to one beautiful one, and does not linger over a choice, knowing perfectly well that her fancy will be of short duration and the dress which she is in the process of buying will be discarded very soon.

In spite of all this, the women of New York are marvelously protected against errors of taste. Their fashion magazines present them with examples of the best taste; their department stores offer them the creations of every country and their ready-made clothes are extraordinarily finished. Yet we still often say in France that American women do not know how to buy. Here we buy something because we think it beautiful or of good workmanship, and we consider the use to which we will put it as much as its appearance.

Must we therefore conclude that abundance may blunt good taste? Poverty is an astonishing magic wand. A woman who can afford to buy only one dress generally goes to such trouble to choose it that she makes a good buy. She very often achieves more style and elegance than the woman who possesses a large wardrobe. Why is America, in essence so rich, such an advocate of inexpensive fashion?

These reflections on America do not bring me to any pessimistic conclusion. We live in the times we do, and nothing is sillier than to turn one's back on them. It is therefore without bitterness that I state that this famous café society, where I have so many charming friends, represents only a very small part of America and one which is in the process of disappearing. Millionaires of the old sort are becoming as rare as the last Indians. Soon little will distinguish them from the well-to-do worker; both will enjoy the average mechanical household conveniences that have supplanted the luxury of another day.

Paris, on the other hand, represents the sense of finish and perfection. It is there, more than anywhere else, that quality

of craftsmanship is really understood, and we Frenchmen must preserve this tradition. My knowledge of America helped me to understand France and its resources better, and filled me with a strong desire to return home. I had just been plunged into the most complete expression of the "functional" twentieth century; now I was longing, in spite of the glories and grandeurs of New York, for the sense of proportion of ancient Europe.

It had been wonderful to experience the American way of life for several weeks, and to adopt habits which I would have to be careful to drop the moment I returned to France. There an altogether different mode of life, more old-fashioned but better suited to my nature, was waiting for me. When I got back, I could have kissed the earth and greeted every blade of grass.

An extraordinary emotion overcomes me every time I return home. I pity those who are not sufficiently attached to a particular civilization to experience this feeling. The most humble landscape seems to me to be bathed in a special light because it is the light of my own country. These stones which have been coated with the patina of time are my own stones. Even the carelessness that I detest is the carelessness of my own country and has its charm for me.

When I reached home, Paris had still not forgotten the war. The wounds in its walls were still there. But above the city floated the clear blue sky of France—our beloved and incomparable sky.

■

PART II

FROM THE IDEA

TO

THE DRESS

■



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My "petites gravures"

THE CREATION OF A COLLECTION

AT THE RISK of being thought soulless and without denying my interest in architecture and interior decoration, I must admit that clothes are my whole life. Ultimately everything I know, see or hear, every part of my life, turns around the clothes which I create. They haunt me perpetually, until they are ready to pass from the world of my dreams into the world of practical use.

How then is a collection created? I am often asked where I get my inspiration from, but I can honestly say that I do not know. Perhaps a psychoanalyst—who was also a couturier—would be able to reconstruct my emotional history by comparing my successive collections. He would not, though, find the mass of documents which people fondly imagine that a designer thumbs through for inspiration. I do not say that there is necessarily anything wrong with using history for inspiration, but I do say that it has never been of any help to me. Far from stimulating me, having an exact historical source in front of me curtails my imagination. A country, a style, or an epoch are interesting only for the idea behind them; looking at an old design might incline one to copy it without fresh inspiration. This is so true that even when I am designing costumes for a historical play, I firmly shut my books, once I have consulted them, put away my prints, and allow a certain amount of time to elapse before taking up my pencil. That is the only real way one can recreate the spirit of the country in which the action is supposed to take place—

though, of course, an exhibition or museum can be a source of inspiration with regard to details.

Fashion has a life and laws of its own which are outside the province of everyday intelligence. Personally, I know exactly what I must give to my designs: care, trouble, and enthusiasm. My designs must be the reflection of my daily life, showing the same feelings, the same joys, the same tenderness. If some have disappointed me, others have served me faithfully, as I have served them.

The most passionate adventures of my life have therefore been with the fashions I have created. I am obsessed with them. They preoccupy me, they occupy me, and finally they "post-occupy" me, if I may risk the phrase. This half-vicious, half-ecstatic circle makes my life at the same time heaven and hell.

Fashion develops under the impetus of desire and changes under that of disgust. Weariness causes it to burn the idols it has recently adored. The prime need of fashion is to please and attract. Consequently this attraction can not be born of uniformity, the mother of boredom. That is why, although there is no logic in the development of fashion, it has a kind of logical sensitivity which obeys one of two reflexes: reaction or confirmation.

By the end of October, after three months of intensive study I have separated "that which I still love" from "that which I no longer love," and am progressing rapidly toward "that which I shall love in the future." For my seasonal love affair with Fashion begins on the very morning when my last collection is presented to the public.

Hidden behind the gray satin curtain which separates me from the salon, I listen eagerly to the reception accorded to the first showing of my dresses; for this is the beginning of

their true life. Like certain women, they spring to life only when they are admired. That is why I cross-examine the mannequins anxiously about the effect produced by certain models that I consider particularly important. I open my ears wide to the opinions of others: my friends, my clients, journalists and professional buyers—they all contribute something of value to the new fashion born in the confusion of congratulations which follows the first official showing of a collection. My sensitivity is acute and I notice the least nuance in the reception of each model. I experience tremendous pleasure from the triumph of one model, a pang from the semifailure or near success of another. Of course, the slightest criticism murmured in between two sips of champagne can arouse a burning fire in my breast. Curiously enough, in the grand ball of a collection it is sometimes the most dearly beloved models, the favorite children, which unjustly become wallflowers, so that even in the sweetness of success there is some drop of bitterness and disappointment.

A historian like my friend Gaxotte reckons that fifty years have to elapse before one can give a considered opinion of any event, but I never have more than three months in which to reflect on my past collection before I have to return to work. "Fashion dies young," wrote Cocteau, and it is therefore natural that its rhythm should be more hectic than that of history.

The weeks which follow the first showing have a decisive influence on the collection that is yet to be born. It is then that I perform my ritual of self-criticism, in which I am assisted by the newspaper and magazine photographs or drawings which often throw an entirely new light on my creations. A detail which I had inserted without thinking and which had become lost in the course of execution will emerge miraculously under the pencil of the artist or through the lens of the

camera, as a result of a curious angle or unexpected lighting. Perhaps these revelations are a proof of the independence of my creations from their creator, and yet they also testify to their fidelity to him.

Even more useful to me is seeing my dresses live upon the backs of my clients. Although I very rarely go into the fitting rooms, I have all its echoes sedulously reported to me. Thus I am kept fully informed about the selections of the professional buyers and those of my individual clients, not always identical. Supplemented by other reports from the workrooms, these weave a sort of net on which I have to embroider the theme of the next collection. For all this time I am meeting my dresses again. Like dear friends, I meet them at dinners and balls; a little later I meet them in the street—further away from the original, this time, because they are copies. Finally I discover major or minor travesties of my original conception in shop windows. But even these copies, which are more like deformations, are of use to me; in terms of a certain saturation, they show me all the pitfalls into which I have fallen, and give me both a shock and a lesson. Every woman invests a dress with her particular personality; thus a model worn by Marie looks quite different when worn by Chantal: dimmed by one, transfigured by the other. Having discovered the difference, I still have to find the reason for it.

That terrible calculating, professional eye which apparently I possess: I suppose I shall never lose it. I have been told that women feel undressed by my stern regard! They are wrong: I am simply redressing them in quite different clothes. But even this harmless intention must shine out of my eyes, for it embarrasses the woman to whom I am speaking, and also gives me a complex once I discover what is happening. Yet I do this with all women, close friends as well as perfect strangers. Incidentally, my professional eye also stops me from paying a

compliment to a pretty woman wearing one of my dresses, because I might seem to be attributing to myself part of her success; this discretion has its advantages, because if it imposes silence upon me when I am satisfied, it also allows me to conceal my reaction when I am disappointed. I have sworn to mention no individual names, because it would be unfitting to turn this book into a sort of *Concours d'Elégance*. But I should like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all the women who have given me so much pleasure by knowing how to wear my dresses.

If I worry about the way my dresses are worn in the outside world, I worry equally about those of my rivals, which reveal how they have solved the very problems which face me. It is strange and impalpable—this influence which couturiers have on one another. It arises from the fact that every season, in the various dressmaking houses, there are two or three pilot models created either by chance or by deliberate choice, which will determine the trend of the future. Meanwhile, the need for synthesis makes the newspapers impose an artificial unity upon the season's fashions. The apparently prevailing trend is the choice of journalists and clients. Wide distribution and the modern taste for slogans accentuate this simplification still further, and induce all women to buy more or less the same dress. In this way each collection contains about twenty models which become "best sellers."

In their shadow the pilot models of which I spoke often pass unappreciated. But the famous professional eye cannot be fooled; every couturier benefits from them, either immediately or sometimes after several seasons, by developing them to their fullest so that in time they will take the place of the current fashions. One can only say that these pilot models are the ones which truly mold fashion, and distill that celebrated and unique Paris air. Sobriety of elegance and rare

good taste are not enough to explain why so many collections—each so jealously guarding its secrets—disclose the same magic formula on the appointed day.

The midseason collections formerly marked the passage from the purely analytical period into the period of creation. Three months after the major collection every big house produced a modified and synthesized version of its ideas—a sort of “digest.” These midseason collections were intended to reawaken public interest by introducing about thirty new models, certain of which accentuated the principal tendencies of the past collection, while others paved the way for something new. But as the season grew longer and skilled workers harder to find, this type of collection more or less died out.

That is why I always get so much satisfaction from designing the collection for my New York house. It fulfills the same function in my mind as the midseason collections did before the war. Proceeding from a familiar theme, one which only recently has completely absorbed my energies, I effect revisions and transformations. Some of the models have to be adapted to the needs of American ready-to-wear—a much larger public. Ordinarily I start by simplifying, but if one works in the grip of a previous inspiration it soon leads one to seek to add something new. One gets bored with mere recopying. And so a transitional style is gradually created, and it becomes an entirely new collection for New York, no longer the same as the Paris one: nearly always several models in it presage the major trends of tomorrow’s collection. Before preparing for New York I allow myself a whole month of solitude.

One of the strangest facts about the designer’s profession—which the uninitiated find incomprehensible—is that a fashion is always decided *out* of season. The winter collection is worked upon in the season of lilac and cherry blossom, the summer collection when the leaves or the first snowflakes are

falling. We couturiers are like poets. A little nostalgia is necessary for us. We like to dream of summer in the middle of winter and vice versa. It would be as impossible for me to create a summer dress in the month of August as it would be to create a new model outside the context of the whole collection. Equally indispensable to the creator are the distance separating him from the season for which he is designing and the infinite variety of the completed collection.

Back to the actual creation of my collection. During the first days of the rest which I allow myself, tortured by regret, caprice and curiosity all at once, I abstain from designing altogether. I am frightened of giving birth to premature designs whose insufficiently developed forms will incumber me in the future. Half-irritated, half-happy at what I have already decided, above all longing to put my thoughts down on paper, I spend several weeks in this state of incubation. Finally I retire to the country. This migration resembles the journey of the eels to the Saragossa Sea, or the gathering of penguins on their island. When I set off, I already know that between the first and the fifteenth of the month I shall have covered endless pads of paper with a crowd of tiny hieroglyphical figures, which I alone can decipher.

I scribble everywhere, in bed, in my bath, at meals, in my car, on foot, in the sun, indoors, by day and by night. Bed and bath, where one is not conscious, so to speak, of one's body, are particularly favorable to inspiration; here one's spirit is at ease. There is also the element of chance inspiration; stones, trees, human beings, mere gestures, or a sudden ray of light may all be bearers of little whispered messages which require instant interpretation. As Leonardo da Vinci walked in the Florentine countryside, he observed the patterns in the sand or the sky and transposed them into his pictures in the forms of patches of light. On a more modest scale,

my dresses take shape all around me, as my fancy works on whatever it happens to see.

Suddenly one such flash of inspiration gives me an electric shock. Passionately, I work out endless variations on this one theme. The next morning it may be another line, another silhouette, which has perhaps come to me during the night, giving me another inspiration. The design seems to hail you like a friend you encounter when you are away on vacation. You tell yourself that there can be no doubt about it at all—it is your friend. With models, too, you have a sense of conspiracy based on the fact that you have always known them. On the whole, the models created after such flashes of inspiration are the most successful ones of all.

Little by little, the pile of drawings grows, demanding new treatments capable of exploring all their potentialities. Finally this crazy burst of scribbling comes to an end. Then I behave like a baker who knows when to leave a well-kneaded pastry alone. Now that the line from which the new fashion can emerge is determined, I stop. For several days I put aside all thoughts connected with fashion. The revision that follows this interlude gains sureness from the rest which I have had. I examine all my sketches, from the first, which are scarcely more than rough outlines, to the last born, where the shape is much more clearly defined. The selection takes place more or less automatically. I sense from the first what promises well; the worthless element eliminates itself. Next, within the space of two or three days, I execute several hundred drawings, in order to give my ideas expression. Ideas flock into my head one after the other; a single sketch sparks a whole series. The total of these drawings constitutes the basis of the future collection; and now I am in haste to get them to the workrooms, in order that the sketches can be transformed into dresses.

Up till now I have only discussed the actual designing of dresses. When it comes to giving them a practical expression, it is time for the thousand hands which fashion, cut, baste and mount a dress to intervene. From my small general staff in the studio, down to the youngest apprentices, the avenue Montaigne becomes a hive of industry. For now I put my sketches, piping hot, into the hands of Mme Marguerite.

I seat myself at a light-colored table near the window of the studio, with Mme Marguerite, Mme Raymonde and Mme Bricard around me. Suddenly I am stricken by a doubt. The optical effects of the studio are different from those of the places where I have been designing; they recreate immediately an atmosphere of work, of exigency even. How will my designs, which I thought were so familiar, strike me in this new light? Drawings can be either shapeless or precise. It all depends on the touch of the hand, the physical position and the nature of the mood at the moment of creation. The important thing is that they should be expressive. The great mistake of the fashion schools is teaching their pupils simply to turn out finished drawings or abstract patterns. In order to excite the enthusiasm of a *première*, or my own for that matter, a sketch must suggest pace and gestures, must evoke a moving body; it must be alive.

My preliminary sketches, which in the charming if archaic language of dressmaking are still called "*petites gravures*," "little prints," are mere scrawls and do not give details of the stitching unless they are strikingly new. As the sketches are passed from hand to hand, I comment on them and fill in the picture with the help of a few purely technical explanations about the cut or lay of the material. This is the first step in the metamorphosis of the sketch into the dress. I survey the sketch again in the light of the reactions of my faithful

counselors. As the designs accumulate, a certain tendency becomes noticeable.

One halts suddenly in front of one of them and exclaims: "Oh, I love that one!"

It is passed from hand to hand; its details are carefully studied. Then we all turn back to the sketches that went before it. Thanks to the impression which the last sketch made upon us, the others now take on a new significance. In the majority of cases, these revelations after the event teach us the same lesson: it is the simplest line, the most self-explanatory design—where the principle of the dress is most clearly stated—which wins us over. It conquers us because its very simplicity is alive. Now all that remains is to give the drawing concrete shape and "expression." Over and over again in the course of our work the word "expression" occurs.

"Have I expressed you correctly?" Marguerite asks me.

I tell the *première*: "Your dress has not got the expression I want!" The art of making a dress from a design lies in achieving the correct expression.

Some people have done me the honor of finding a central theme in each of my successive collections. In all humility I am prepared to believe they are right. Although a couturier is naturally anxious to have good cutting and sewing, he feels constantly this desire to express himself. For all its ephemerality, dress designing constitutes a mode of self-expression comparable to architecture or painting.

Once I have shown all my sketches, Mme Marguerite distributes them, according to personal preferences. The *premières* are allowed a certain freedom of choice, for, after all, one can only "express" that which one feels with one's heart.

As Mme Marguerite distributes the drawings, she recapitulates and develops the points which I have made to her. If I happen to come into the studio when she is in the midst of

her explanations, I am touched to see the interest and enthusiasm on the faces around me. Everybody seems to be anxious to grasp the problems posed by the new designs; in their anxiety not to let the least detail escape them, even the most experienced of the *premières* shows the eagerness and freshness of a beginner. And yet what talent there is in their practiced hands!

Like sap, the creative idea circulates now throughout the whole building. It reaches the apprentices and the seamstresses; soon the fingers that work on the muslin models—the fingers that hesitate over a seam and prick themselves on a needle—are fashioning the styles of tomorrow. For a whole week the house is a busy hive of questions and counter-questions. Everyone works out his own solution to the problem of the new line and compares it with that evolved by the workroom next door. I resolutely refuse to interfere in this process. I believe that each of my workers should be left free to work out his or her form of self-expression with some latitude given to the inspiration of the moment.

The *première* examines and analyzes her appointed sketch, and when she has got the feel of it, she drapes her muslin around a dummy. Then she steps back, examines the effect, corrects it, balances it, and often destroys it entirely in order to start again. After several fruitless attempts, the exact meaning of the material becomes apparent to her and the dress starts to take shape. An assistant is then called to pin the muslin, which is still only draped. Little by little the pile of sketches diminishes in each workroom as the models are divided up among the most competent forewomen.

In order to check my impatience I busy myself with the choice of the buttons, belts, accessories and jewelry to be worn with each dress. I also choose materials from rolls which have been ordered several weeks before, an almost ritual ceremony

which I will describe later. During the week when I am waiting for the *toiles*, the muslin models, to make their first appearance, I involve myself in these various activities more to calm my nerves than to get on with the work.

FROM THE TOILE TO THE DRESS

THE NEW collection is like the arrival of spring in the studio. During the off season the studio is as white, bare and gloomy as a laboratory; now the samples of material are like the shoots of growing flowers.

Belts hang in dozens from the tables; scarves and hats clutter up the shelf under the blackboard where the names of the mannequins are written. In every direction, there are signs that the new collection is under way. This happy world of wool and silk, soon to blossom on the streets, is sternly guarded against intruders. Whenever there is a rumor that a stranger is approaching, veils of white cloth are flung over everything, covering the new materials and obscuring the accessories. The busy workroom is transformed in an instant into a living room full of covered furniture—as though the occupants were off on a long trip. This little comedy never ceases to amuse me.

When the veils are removed, the studio is once again a busy hive, and the great day approaches when the first *toiles* are to be shown. Of course Mme Marguerite turns faint at the idea of showing them to me, and the *premières* are fearful of having made some awful mistakes. Even I myself begin to wonder what these dream children of mine will really look like when I am actually confronted with them.

What follows next is a solemn moment for us all. Those first muslin models or *toiles* generally number about sixty, and they consist of reproductions of the most significant of

the sketches—those I have asked to see at once. Now at last I do see them!

Two or three of my mannequins are chosen to show them to me. Of course all the *jeunes filles* (as we call the mannequins) who work for me are both graceful and pretty, but inevitably certain of them inspire me more than others. Undoubtedly there exists between these girls and me a kind of sympathy or sense of affinity, which I imagine obeys the inexplicable rules that govern these attractions. For one must make a distinction between the successful and the “inspiring” mannequin: they are not necessarily the same ones, since I see my collection with quite different eyes from those of the general public. The successful mannequin is an extrovert, who takes a pride in her profession; she has to “capture” and, in trade jargon, “carry off” the dress. The inspiring mannequin, on the other hand, is an introvert and for me alone expresses the mood, tradition and line of a dress, from the first instant of its creation.

Too often the couturier is pictured as gaily draping a mannequin. Actually it very seldom happens that way. One only builds a model after long hours of preliminary labor and on a well-planned base. The process of draping the dress on the mannequin cannot take place until all the cutting of the collection has been satisfactorily accomplished.

The first showing of the *toiles* on the mannequins is done amidst “Oh’s” and “Ah’s,” equally expressive of joy and disapproval. Some of the exclamations are more explicit.

“Darling, your *toile* is perfect!”

“My dear, for heaven’s sake throw that thing in the wastebasket!”

When a *toile* is successful, it is immediately personalized; if it is a failure, it is relegated to the rank of nameless “things.”

Very often the models that captivate us at first look have

been made from sketches which passed quite unnoticed under our noses; on the basis of this new inspiration, we build a whole new series of dresses. And other sketches, which apparently promised great things, produce only "duds" to be eliminated without delay. Some of the *toiles* turn out quite different from what I had imagined; they are not necessarily failures, but the design has been misinterpreted in some way. The *premières*, like the photographers and fashion artists, have read into the design something I had not intended. Any artistic creation that depends on another brain for its interpretation often produces some surprises for its author. This applies to dresses as much as to plays. It is up to the designer to turn such mishaps into advantages.

Thus, if the outcome is satisfactory, I let the model take its chances until such time as I may decide to return to my original project—when I will explain it better or else give it to another workroom. Sometimes I intrust the same sketch to several different workrooms, knowing that in this way I will obtain different types of *toiles* from which I can either choose the most successful version or else find in some of them the basis for new departures.

Like the sketches which inspired them, these *toiles* have very little detail; their importance is entirely in their cut, line and shape. These are the fundamental *toiles* on which the whole collection is based. Details like lapels, bows, pockets, cuffs or belts, are added later unless they happen to be indispensable to the construction of the model.

The day when the first *toiles* are shown is the most crucial in the whole development of the collection. Now I am able to select from among the models I have designed five or six basic lines, expressed in dresses, suits or coats.

Next, I call a meeting of my mannequins. I have them all put on the same type of models—suits or evening sheaths or

pleated dresses. The session continues until all the models have been inspected—often well into the night. As I go home, new shapes and silhouettes dance in front of my eyes, and I am in a state of turmoil over everything I have seen. I am simultaneously exhausted and delighted. I am well aware, of course, that this first moment of enthusiasm will not last; long, hard work lies ahead before these tentative approaches to creation become creations worthy of the name.

The next day finds me in a more sober mood, and I decide to see the *toiles* all over again, to decide and settle on the main outlines of the collection. I have the *toiles* brought back once again, one by one, in order to list them. The session does not always go absolutely smoothly! Opinions are divided and a mannequin is sometimes made to show the same model two or three times, sent out, asked to come in once more . . . or it can even happen that the model is tried on another mannequin. It is fatal to proceed too fast, to run the risk of overlooking a basically excellent model, which for the moment has not been carried out properly. After mature reflection, a hundred questions, and healthy doubts, a decision is finally made and duly noted by Mme Raymonde.

Too often people believe that a collection develops in bursts of enthusiasm and caprice, without any co-ordinated plan. In point of fact, it is always built up along lines that have been established well in advance. Mme Raymonde draws up a complete chart of the collection on several large sheets of paper; she maps out space for a certain number of daytime dresses, suits, coats and evening dresses. I force myself to reduce this skeleton plan to the minimum, knowing perfectly well that sooner or later we will break out of it. I try to be wary of the seductive pleasures of invention, luring me on toward fresh creations, for I know that certain materials and embroideries, which I have had set aside for me, will need new

designs. I also know that there will always be some last-minute dresses. They are born of various impulses; in some cases I want to appeal to a type of woman or occasion I have involuntarily neglected; in others I want to underline some detail of the cut or design that I find insufficiently illustrated in the other dresses in the collection.

Even my most fanatical clients agree that there are always too many models in any one collection. They are absolutely right. A two-hour show without an intermission is far too long. Besides, it is always too hot in the salons. But though it is true that there are far too many dresses for each individual woman, you must remember that I serve professional buyers and private customers of vastly different needs. In every country there are women thin and fat, dark and fair, subdued and flamboyant. There are some women with a beautiful *décolletage*, and others whose aim is to disguise their hips. Some are too tall, others too short. The world is wonderfully full of beautiful women whose shapes and tastes offer an inexhaustible diversity. My collection must cater to each one of them, and if I really wanted to satisfy them completely, I should have to design not 170 models but at least twice as many. Fortunately, the chart of my collection is there to keep me in check, even though it seems to be acting like a strait jacket on my imagination.

At last the moment has come actually to decide. The *toiles* which have been judged worthy of transformation into actual models have been classified, described, numbered and roughly sketched by Mme Raymonde. Now I have them paraded singly in front of me for one last time. The next step is to indicate which mannequin will wear which model, and the material in which it is to be made.

The dress and the mannequin are often as inseparable as the dress and the material. Of the dozen girls who present

my collection, three or four can show anything to advantage. But for the others who have a more individual type of beauty, I have to be careful to choose models which will harmonize with their figures and styles. Yet I must reconcile this choice with the problem of simple arithmetic. For unless there are to be empty spaces in the final parade, each mannequin has to show approximately the same number of dresses.

Then, too, each girl must be given a balanced number of daytime dresses, cocktail dresses and evening gowns. It is obviously impossible to work this out exactly, and I am frequently made miserable during a show when I see a woolen suit parade in the midst of a series of more formal dresses, or a short evening dress in the midst of full-length gowns. The most successful model cannot stand up to such unfair competition.

And if the choice of mannequin is important, that of the material is even more so because, once chosen, it is very hard to remedy a mistake. This very important operation of choosing the material has several stages. Every couturier has his own work method; a few are inspired by the material to create their dresses but the majority proceed from a *toile* which has been cut from a sketch or from the designer's instructions. Personally, whatever the variety, beauty or novelty of the materials displayed to me, they are always a secondary consideration. When work on the new collection is nearing completion, and the new line is definitely formulated, I do allow myself occasionally to be tempted by the texture, color or pattern of a particular material. I drape it in folds there and then, as long as I am convinced that there already exists a satisfactory basic design on which the dress can be founded.

My prime inspiration is the form of the female body. Since

the female form is the point of departure, the art of the couturier consists of using the materials at his disposal so as to enhance its natural beauty. I have no wish to deprive fashion (and the ladies) of the added allure and charm of color, but I could perfectly well design a whole collection in black or white and express all my ideas to my complete satisfaction. Color cannot transform a failure into a success; it merely plays a supporting role in a cast where the cut is the star performer.

In order to relate materials to the general background of *haute couture*, I must digress a little. Two months before I even rough out my first sketch I have to make a preliminary selection. For that is when the dealers in silk and wool, the lacemakers, men who in the time of the French kings had the same privileges as nobles, call upon me. They come from all over the world, from Paris, London, Roubaix, Lyons, Milan and Zurich, and they bring with them the wealth of the Low Countries and the richness of the Orient.

I await them with my two assistant designers, Mme Raymonde and my piece-goods staff at my side. It is like receiving an embassy. Rising to our feet to greet the ambassadors, we solemnly shake hands, and in order not to get to the subject of the materials piled up in the corridor too quickly, we chat politely about the preceding season. We recall the materials which have "gone well," and we tell of the sales of the models which were made from them, exactly as if we were friends imparting news of mutual acquaintances whom they have not seen for some time. Then the show starts, and each manufacturer has his characteristic method of display. Some, respectful of the great traditions of the past, are accompanied by a procession of seven or eight trunks which are carried in by bearers, like gifts brought from far-off countries by Oriental potentates. They are set down and opened; then with the

deftness of a magician, the bearer spills out the multicolored pieces. I have before me a rainbow of colors, all equally tempting.

Others arrive with small dispatch cases, like peddlers selling their wares on the street. Out of them they produce tiny samples, often only the size of postage stamps, and one has to rummage to find treasure. In the spring, when the prints run riot amid the plain materials which are the basis of the collection, all this leads to a delicious confusion.

As in the world of dressmaking, it is the big firms that supply the best quality, color and design. The fabrics they put forward naturally influence the collection which is to come, but these fabrics have themselves been suggested by the past collection, so they insure the continuity of fashion from one season to the next.

At this moment I have no idea what materials I shall be wanting in two months' time. Paradoxically enough, this makes it quite easy for me to choose. Instead of hesitating between what I think will be useful and what I think I want, I am able to decide between what pleases me and what doesn't. I give way to my instinctive reactions.

Contrary to popular belief, a designer very rarely commissions a material from the manufacturer. Of course materials can be inspired by stray conversations between the two men, and by desires vaguely expressed several months before. For that very reason I am always very careful to avoid proposing precise themes, material or shades of color in our casual chats. For one thing, I am well aware of the impermanence of my own whims; for another, in such an essentially collective business as fashion design, I do not want to lose the benefit of the interaction of many different ideas and views.

It is from this profusion of materials which I have selected two months before that I have to make my first choice, in the

interval between the display of the sketches and the emergence of the *toiles*; I go back a second time for the printed fabrics. First of all I eliminate everything which definitely does not please me and which is therefore incumbering the studio to no purpose. (The rest of the materials continue to submerge it with their mounting waves.) I then mark my favorites with a cross and have them put in special cases. Of course I know perfectly well that I shall find new favorites every day. Nevertheless, the foundations of my selection have been laid, and all these glistening, alluring rolls, dangerous by their very beauty, are now listed and catalogued by color and type and also, if possible, by manufacturer. They inundate my studio. They also illuminate it.

Surrounded by my staff, I now concentrate entirely on the problem of the mannequin still in her *toile*. Among all these engulfing materials, there must be one which suits both the dress and the girl. I have to resist many insidious temptations; sometimes it is the color which attracts me, sometimes the texture of the material. Of the two, the latter is the more likely to captivate me because I never choose a material solely because of its exquisite shade; it must have a texture that seems exactly right for the effect I want to achieve. Many factors have to be taken into consideration: the suppleness or the "body" of the cloth, the weight or the thickness. The material is stretched out straight and on the bias. It is weighed; stroked—for it must not scratch the skin; rubbed—for the dye must not come off; and examined in the light—for the color must suit the complexion of the mannequin who is going to wear it. How many examinations, such tests it must pass! But none is useless, because in the long run the form of a model will depend almost as much on the way the fabric behaves as on the cut itself.

There are probably eight or nine of us together in the

studio. Facing me is a lone mannequin in white muslin standing in front of a large mirror; behind me are two designers. Mme Raymonde with the help of Claude, her assistant, is busy hunting for the material most nearly corresponding to my scarcely formulated desire. Mme Marguerite is supposed to remain at my side, but cannot sit still on her chair. Unable to mask her impatience, she runs up and down between the model and the seat to which I keep recalling her. Next to the mannequin stands the *première* or the tailor who is responsible for making the *toile*. In a corner stands Jeanine, nicknamed "Boutonnette," who is in charge of accessories (her hour has not yet come), and Frontine, pencil in air, ready to make out cutting tickets for the piece-goods department. From time to time Mme Bricard emerges from her hatboxes, sails in magnificently, gives one definitely adverse comment, condemns an unfortunate fabric with a look, or suddenly plumps for a daring color.

But most of the time this ritual, which would baffle an outsider, consists of choosing from among thirty black woolen materials, of excellent quality, the only one that is really right. As I hesitate between the rival claims of the various wools submitted to me, and try to get an idea, the pieces of material are draped over the shoulder of the mannequin, so that I can judge the softness and fall, in relation to the *toile* which is still visible on the other shoulder.

Certain combinations are obviously unsuitable.

"Oh, no—take that away at once."

And I point to another piece. This one, instead of immediately sliding off the mannequin's bust, stays there. We all look at it. Does it really suit her? It certainly seems to. . . . But after all, perhaps not. So I ask anyone at random: "What do you think of it?"

They all know perfectly well that I don't really want to

hear their opinion, and so they hardly bother to give me a serious reply. All the same, their mere presence is of assistance to me. A reply, whatever it is, crystallizes my doubts. I press them further: "And you, Boutonnette, what do you think of it?"

Boutonnette nods her head without committing herself; then it is Claude's turn, and in this way the whole room joins in, from Mme Marguerite down to the mannequin, who, as the debate continues, begins to feel the first prickings of fatigue. The choice is made at the price of universal tension. It needs only the indifference of one person to destroy the whole climate of passionate collective concentration. Sometimes the decision is made almost at once; sometimes there are dozens of false tries. In the end, we may revert to something we had previously dismissed as hopeless, after rummaging among the discarded pieces of material. Wretched fabric! Once again it is draped, redraped, examined and re-examined. It is never manipulated by the same hand twice; a dozen hands are there to wreak their will upon it.

At last, like an umbilical cord, the length is cut. The die has been cast; the model's fate is decided! Mme Raymonde returns to her seat, registers the material in her book, makes a note that she must tell the manufacturer, and gives a card to Frontine who will pass it on to the piece-goods department.

Sometimes a dress is christened at the very moment of its birth, but we generally prefer to wait until we know it better before giving it a name; the baptism of a dress has a sort of sacramental quality.

We may now either pass it on to the next *toile* or else take the same one all over again and choose a second material for it; a particularly striking *toile* may give birth to a whole set of dresses in a variety of different colors and materials. At the same time as a second choice is made, I hastily draw, leaning

on a corner of the table, the details which will make the new model different from the previous one, that is, unless I postpone any change until I have seen my reactions to the first fitting.

Now another mannequin enters. Perhaps as many as fifty or a hundred pieces of material will have to be unrolled for her. We will see the dress in gray, pink, green, both dull and shiny black. . . . No, none of them will do! The only thing that has been decided so far is the weight and feel of the material, for the shape of the *toile* has determined that in advance. The bales of cloth pile up upon the floor; they seem to get uglier and uglier. Time passes; silence falls. I no longer fire questions, and my gestures of command become curter and curter. Finally, I decide to put off making my choice until the next day.

Once I am at home, I find myself still mulling over the debatable materials in the middle of the night—one of those collection-haunted nights which merge with the day in a single feverish saraband. The next day I do actually manage to reach a decision.

In spite of all this care, it does sometimes happen that materials which have been chosen with the greatest possible thought are found to have concealed a bad point which comes out only when the dress is sewed together. Dressmaking is the marriage of design and material. There are many instances of perfect harmony—and some of disaster.

THE BIRTH OF THE COLLECTION

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, it is in the course of the ten days and also, for me, ten nights, during which the selection of the materials goes on, that "the line," or to be more precise "the lines," are decided. An all-around-the-clock collection is not developed on a single theme, but on seven or eight principal motifs. It must have an agreeable variety, and at the same time present a general harmony so that it is never self-contradictory. This is why half the models never reach the actual collection. Our first enthusiasm encourages us to put far too many *toiles* into execution; later we have to destroy a great number of them.

Now the models are put through the intricate process of construction. At the moment when life is about to be breathed into the new creation, one has to reconcile two apparently irreconcilable forces: personality and discipline. The workrooms fall enthusiastically upon the *toiles* which have been allotted to them. There are interminable telephone conversations with the manufacturers. This length of material has turned out to be insufficient, more must be supplied immediately; but when it does arrive, it does not conform to the original width. Fury. Protestations. Mme Raymonde fights endlessly against delays, errors, disappointments and impatience. Marguerite revises and corrects mistakes. Meanwhile I await the results in a fever of anxiety.

My anxiety is prolonged for five or six whole days. Neither Marguerite nor I know exactly when it will come to an end.

Our meetings and conversations are like those of a nurse and a father-to-be. Every time she sees me, she knows that I shan't be able to resist putting the inevitable question: "How do they look? And when will they be done?"

Finally, the models are ready, and on the one day I had not expected them.

When they arrive, our hearts are in our mouths; for whereas the *toiles* have the charm of a rough sketch, leaving the imagination free to conceive the rest, what we are now being faced with is grim reality. I must say at once that we are sometimes bowled over by what we see—and sometimes appalled! Most frequently we calculate with horror the work which still needs to be done before the dress begins to resemble our dream. Some of the dresses have been irretrievably ruined. We find them indecent, we almost want to insult them, because they seem to mock us. There are cries of:

"It's ghastly! It's an outrage! Into the wastebasket with it! Away with it to the dustbin!"

On the other hand, by way of compensation, there are some which look so delicious that we could hug them.

"It's a dream!" we cry, as if we were gazing at the work of quite another hand than our own. "It really came off, didn't it?"

I have often thought what an extraordinary impression this passionate vocabulary would produce on an uninitiated spectator; satisfaction is expressed without shame, disappointment without limits. In order to understand these violent reactions, you would have to share our joys, our anxieties, our hopes, our long nights of painstaking toil. You would then have no doubt that ours is a labor of love.

I now sit tensely in my chair. I have each new entry announced to me by the rather pompous-sounding phrase:

"*Monsieur, un modèle.*"

This announcement plays the same part as the three knocks which precede the raising of the theater curtain in France. Thanks to it, I get the full impact of the dress; by making a grand entrance like a distinguished guest, the mannequin can use all the resources at her command to make an impression. My surroundings fade away. The model is alone at the center of the stage.

After absorbing this first all-important impression, I ask the mannequin to come nearer, to walk toward me, so that I can examine the dress in motion. I then inspect it in the large mirror opposite me, which gives me another angle. The mirror shows up its faults ruthlessly. Mme Marguerite, who has already repaired a great number of models behind the scenes, notices the faults at the same time I do, and instinctively steps forward to correct them. I have to keep waving her back with my stick, forcing her to sit down, so that I can steep myself in the feeling of the dress.

The *première* is there, very often accompanied by the girl who has sewed the dress. They have brought what is left of the material with them, including odd pieces which I can use, if need be, to remake the sleeves, or the collar, or a pocket. But before passing to these details, I order the mannequin to continue showing the dress. I make her walk forward, backward, and twirl around. I examine the back, the sides, the fit of each section in turn. Finally, I ask myself:

"Is this really what I intended the dress to do?"

It is vital to make no concession to self-esteem at this point—either my own or the *première's*. I must judge implacably. This requires a great deal of concentration. A panel worries me; does that mean its proportions are wrong? Should I make it shorter? No . . . it needs lengthening. And the length of the skirt or the sleeves needs to be altered. Then the neckline has to be raised or lowered. Finally the

seams fall into their true place. The distance between two of them may need altering by only one fraction of an inch, but it makes all the difference to the success of the model. Placed at a certain point on the body, a seam may produce a broadening effect. With an infinitesimal adjustment, it gives an impression of slimness. All these changes tend toward simplification. Here, a seam is apparently useless, so it is removed; there, some pleats look insignificant; they are replaced by skillful ironing or more cunning use of the fall of the material. For one of the major secrets of dressmaking is that a well-cut dress is the dress which is cut the least.

To facilitate the fittings, the dresses arrive at the studio entirely covered with guide threads. These threads, in contrasting colors that show up clearly against the material, have been sewed through every one of the pieces which make up a dress, one following the grain of the material and the other at right angles to it. The bias lies between the two. The guide threads, pitiless critics, reveal all the possible faults in the cut, and must find points of equilibrium in essential parts of the dress. To achieve the *faux-sens*—neither quite on the bias nor quite straight—requires the hand of a master. It is to the couturier what dissonance is to the musician. Badly handled, a *faux-sens*—which can give a whole dress its entire character—forfeits that character completely.

Little by little, the fitting gets under way. Balances are rectified, proportions adjusted. Finally, bristling with pins, studded with pieces of muslin *toile*, fluttering with ribbons of bias-cut material which indicate the position of the principal seams or of alterations, the dress leaves the studio. It had entered apparently so glorious; it leaves almost unrecognizable.

What follows has for me the quality of a miracle. The people in the workrooms seem to be able to decipher an unfathomable code. They find their way in a forest of pins, ap-

parently put in quite haphazardly, and a spiderweb of threads. I have never been able to understand how they manage it. Nevertheless it is a fact that at the first rehearsal, the dress appears with all the desired alterations faithfully carried out, and ready, if necessary, for new ones.

Imagine a manuscript perpetually erased, and continuously rewritten. Generally speaking, at the first fitting a dress rarely looks anything like the way one had pictured it: either instructions for making it were not correctly carried out, or the material did not behave according to anticipation. Models that had been completely satisfactory in the white muslin reveal glaring defects when carried out in the actual fabric. A mistake in quality, or color, makes it necessary to begin all over again. After the first fitting, however, we begin to have an idea of how the dress will look in the end. After surveying it from every angle, and considering every possible kind of alteration that might improve it, I finally steel myself to let it go back to the workroom. An important stage in its life has ended, but it will be followed by several more: the first rehearsal, the dress rehearsal, and the press show. Henceforth, I shall follow the progress of the dresses like an anxious father—proud, jealous, passionate and tender, suffering agonies on their behalf. They have absolute power over me, and I live in perpetual dread that they will let me down.

During this period of the fittings, I am worried by one thing: In the course of all these alterations, these tortured doubts and fears, has my first conception of the dress somehow slipped away?

I am in a terrible mood all this time. My faithful staff tiptoe about the studio, terrified of letting a pin drop, trying simultaneously to make themselves invisible and to do everything they can to help me. At the end of several days, we come to the conclusion there are enough "showable" dresses

ready to make up a general rehearsal. It takes place in the salon where the show will ultimately be held, and has a tremendous importance in my eyes. For the first time the dresses follow after each other more or less as they will do on "The Day."

Against the luxury of the salon setting, most of the dresses come into their own, but a few of them fall by the wayside. There are optical effects in a salon, just as there are in a theater; the dresses generally need either simplification or amplification to fit in properly. A certain detail that had looked charming in the studio now becomes superfluous; a certain width that seemed to be sufficient now has to be exaggerated in order to gain its true effect. After all, it is here in the salon that the model has to make an impression on the press and win the eye of the client. Nevertheless, a dress conceived entirely in order to dazzle in the salon misses its basic aim, which in the last analysis is to be worn.

The effect of the ceremonial entrance of each mannequin, which I have already described as made in the studio, is greatly intensified at this salon rehearsal. I attach a great deal of importance to the shock each model produces when the mannequin first appears at the door. If my satisfaction is complete, I immediately choose a hat to go with the dress; if not, I make the mannequin parade back and forth once or twice, while I examine the dress from all angles. It often takes several minutes to discover exactly where the fault lies. In most cases there is some error of proportion and an overcomplication. I do not let the dress go until it is corrected. Present day fashion is above all a question of line: from shoes to hat, the silhouette must be viewed as a whole.

That is why Mme Bricard and I now pore over the choice of a hat, which has been only vaguely suggested in the sketch. The particular shape and size to balance the "line" of the

dress has to be decided. Before me is a huge pile of assorted straw shapes which are to the hats what the *toiles* are to the dresses. As in the case of the dresses, details will come later. At first all that is necessary is that the hat should suit both the mannequin and the dress for which it is the needed complement. Sometimes the problem seems insoluble. Twenty unsuccessful attempts are made; sometimes in desperation we abandon the fruitless search and invent a new shape which will suit both dress and face.

It may seem odd that we should go to all this trouble over hats when women are wearing them less and less. In my opinion, this regrettable departure is due to a reaction against those miserable pieces of headgear, in straw, bedizened with plumes and flowers, with which women disguised the poverty of their wardrobe during the war. As for me, I consider a woman without a hat to be not completely dressed. The fact that very young girls go without hats does not mean that their mothers benefit from imitating them. They are simply depriving themselves of an agreeable accessory to their appearance and apparently don't realize that the exclamation: "How pretty you look today!" often means "How becoming your hat is!"

It would be out of the question to show a collection without hats. However ravishing their dresses, the mannequins would still have a naked air. This is not an exaggeration; there are circumstances when one may overlook the feeling given the face by a hat, but never in presenting a new line where a hat is essential in achieving its proportions.

The first rehearsal necessarily includes only a small number of models. They are chosen from among the most representative dresses or those which have to be sent away to be embroidered. The latter, which are always of a very simple cut, are urgent. People do not sufficiently understand that embroidery

is still done by hand, as in the eighteenth century (sometimes even on the same frames) and takes a month or three weeks; a ball dress may be entirely covered with millions of sequins or pearls, each one of which has to be put on separately.

To return to the collection: I watch twenty dresses go by, of as varied types as possible. Then I go home and sleep, with a more or less peaceful conscience, waiting till morning before making a final decision. It is astonishing how the passing of a single night permits one to separate what one does not really like from what one adores! The models I choose the next morning will furnish the major theme of the coming collection. It is only now that I can really start to think seriously about the new line; up until now it has scarcely seemed real to me.

From rehearsal to fitting, the collection now follows its predestined course. One indisputably pretty dress gives birth to three or four versions directly inspired by it; another, which up till now had been considered a potential classic, suddenly seems too hackneyed and already out of date. So we progress, with good days and bad days, enthusiasm and revulsions, sometimes even disasters. In the midst of all these contradictory emotions comes the moment when we have to do away pitilessly with all the models we do not really like. These are the dresses which do not fit in with the others and must be sacrificed to the unity of the collection even if they might sell extremely well. As the collection takes shape, we become more and more accustomed to the lines that characterize it. Nothing seems new to us any more. As the date of the show approaches, we know only whether the dresses are well made; we no longer have any idea whether they possess interest as new creations. We have to be wary of familiarity, that overfaithful companion whose presence makes everything seem out of date.

The little world of the avenue Montaigne is thoroughly worn out by this time, and also burning with enthusiasm. One compliment is enough to dissipate all the effects of overwork; a reproach provokes tears of despair. The *première* who sees her dress "thrown into the wastebasket" immediately bursts into tears as though she is to blame, although it is really the fault of the model itself. With the natural and touching blindness of a mother, she looks on the model as her child, and refuses to admit that it is imperfect—even though I am the father and the responsible one. Disgusted with life, she is ready to hand in her notice; two hours later the same *première* will supervise a difficult task and successfully carry through a new inspiration.

Every day the fever mounts; new crises arise which I have to settle. I nearly kill myself repeating over and over again that if the models are "flops" the fault is chiefly mine and no one else's. This argument is unsuccessful; everyone is still convinced that I am horribly unjust. This is the really exhausting stage, when the doctor who looks after the welfare of my workers finds an abrupt change in the nature of the ailments he has to treat. No more rheumatism or stomach-aches, only tenacious migraines due to fatigue and fingers wounded in the cause of hurt pride. Immediately after the visit to the doctor, the girls fling themselves into the elevator or bound up the steps to their particular workroom. They would never forgive themselves if they were not present on "The Day" when all is ready.

In the evening when there is peace at last in my office, and the whole building has quieted down, I think about these joys and sorrows that so exactly reflect my own. I frequently feel remorse, because, quite frankly, I have had to use some harsh words during this period, in spite of all my care to be tactful. The *première* whose two models I have canceled one

after the other, without taking into account the fact that they both came from the same workroom, has had to go back to her girls twice in despair. No doubt she felt a good deal of chagrin, and a quite unjustified sense of shame. The mannequin whom I have told that her dress was unbecoming feels herself slighted. Of course they know in their hearts that it is my aim to make them as pretty as possible, and they themselves often feel that a model does not do them justice—but sometimes they refuse to admit it!

Then, there are the deputations. Mme Raymonde comes furtively into my office in order to warn me.

"I think you ought to say a kind word to Elénore—her dress wasn't as bad as all that. . . ." Or: "You were really too hard on Mme Marguerite; she feels completely discouraged."

Then it is Mme Marguerite's turn to appear; escorted by one of the *premières*, she comes to plead the cause of a model which has been abandoned.

"Do leave it to me, Monsieur Dior. I swear to you that it will be a success. I swear I will save it."

It is a tricky decision to have to make. On the one hand one risks yielding to the charm of an attractive, but for some reason unsuitable, dress; on the other, of allowing weariness to lead to injustice.

Problems of a different nature also arise. A couturier who aims to present a two-hour dramatic spectacle without benefit of either plot or intermission is faced with trials undreamed of by the ordinary theatrical producer. Just the elimination of one dress two days before the actual show can set in motion a cascade of changes on the studio blackboard where the mannequins' names are inscribed, changes affecting the order, rhythm, and balance of the show. The program is drawn up during the various fittings and rehearsals, and is subject to certain very important laws: each mannequin, as I have said,

must wear the same number of dresses of each category; wherever possible, dark and light dresses have to alternate, although there are usually fewer light dresses; the models which we think will sell in large numbers must be judiciously arranged and alternated with the more spectacular models, known as "Trafalgars."

Then suddenly the rhythm of the collection becomes more peaceful. Everyone is so hard at work that the house is silent with concentration. In this deceptive calm, sewing is the order of the day. We have reached the next-to-the-last act, which contains the climax of the play and leads up to the denouement. For this is the eve of the dress rehearsal.

THE DRESS REHEARSAL

ALTHOUGH the *répétition générale*, or dress rehearsal, absorbs me completely, nevertheless it is true to say that I do not see it. I should be incapable of describing it, and so would any of my assistants who are at my side. One of them might just be able to remember that "Gitane" was rechristened "Habanita." Another might remember the name of a model which was sent back to the workroom, or needed a change of buttons, but to talk to us, you would never think we had been actually present at the spectacle. And yet we all devour it with our eyes. Those present are Mme Marguerite, Mme Bricard, the indispensable Mme Raymonde, my secretary Josette Vidmer, Mme Luling, who heads the sales, Mme Linzeler, who supervises all the fittings, my two designers, and five assistants. To them are added M. de Maussbré and M. Donati, in charge of public relations, and two or three saleswomen. In one corner, near the last minute accessories—bags, gloves and jewels—are seated the piece-goods staff. On the other side, in the daylight by the window, sit the two artists who will sketch the models for publicity purposes. Roger Vivier, who has designed the shoes, sits next to the fireplace with Michel Brodsky who is responsible for selling them. Finally, M. Rouët and M. Chastel desert the commercial side of the business—very active at this time—to come and breathe the air of the collection with us from time to time. But the reason we are all incapable of retaining an impression of the whole rehearsal is that we are intent on examining individually the

details of each dress and we remember only what directly concerns us.

This is positively the last chance I have to alter my dresses. Tomorrow they will be presented to the press; if all goes well, they will become slaves of their own success and no longer belong to me. But for a few more hours these are still *my* models. Obsessed by the importance of this final examination, I deliberately ignore everything that is going on around me. I see nothing except my dresses. For obvious reasons, no one who does not belong to the organization is admitted to the dress rehearsal; the tense atmosphere of these last terrible two days remains mercifully unknown to the public.

But I did on one occasion subject our ritual to the scrutiny of an outsider. I asked one of my friends—someone totally ignorant of the world of fashion—to come and sit in the shadow of the mantelpiece, and watch us at our work. Two months later, when the pace had slackened, and I had a little free time, I asked him to describe what had gone on. Here is the tale which, to my amazement, he unfolded to me:

* * *

When I reached the landing on the second floor, I lost myself in white muslin. Successfully evading this first barrier of snow, I had to face a second, from which I was courteously pushed away by a firm hand. I heard the murmured word *cabine* [dressing room]. To my right, a third and a fourth curtain awaited me, which masked the entry to the grand salon, the goal of my expedition. I felt lost in an atmosphere of airiness. There was complete silence around me, but a silence full of rustling, rather like the silence in the theater just before the play begins. Then a hand lifted up the diaphanous curtain, and invited me to penetrate into the sanctuary.

I was struck by a tremendous impression of whiteness. The whiteness was reflected by the two rows of armchairs installed on

my right, all covered with snow, on which several girls in white smocks were sitting. Except for the gold and the crystal of chandeliers and the classical gray and white decoration of the walls, with its large mirrors, I might have been present at some council of ghosts. Then my eyes were dazzled by a fantastic Cinderella's trousseau, strewn on the carpet on my right. Accessories, whose beauty took one's breath away, luxuries and frivolities of every sort were there jumbled up in delicious but ordered chaos, as though thrown down by the prodigal hand of a fairy godmother. I felt myself led by a benevolent hand and placed in a chair in the corner of the fireplace, clearly destined for me. I sat down, and busied myself trying to look as small as possible.

The salon was still almost empty, but very soon other people came and sat down. They all stared at me, and I knew they were wondering: "Who on earth is he?"

I felt myself growing smaller and smaller in the secretive atmosphere. Finally, somebody must have given a tentative explanation of my presence, because there were shrugs of the shoulders, and doubtful, polite or interested "Oh's" and "Ah's." These interrogations were made in low voices; heaven knows why they all spoke so softly! The delicate inspection which they made of me must have satisfied them; probably they guessed from my behavior that I was really quite inoffensive. To my great relief, their attention was soon directed elsewhere.

I took advantage of the respite to look about me. Opposite me, Cinderella's trousseau glowed beneath the light of the projectors set at the four corners of the platform. Nearby, encroaching on the smaller salon, was an open closet stuffed with furs, making me shiver at the thought of winter. The panel on the left was occupied by a large table which held a profusion of belts and an arsenal of jewelry. An old lady, nearsighted as a goldsmith, was indefatigably arranging brooches, earrings, and rows of jet and diamonds. I strongly suspected she might upset them on purpose as soon as she had finished her work, for she took such obvious satisfaction in it! Not far from her, a young man in a blue jacket with gold buttons contemplated the scene.

It was at this moment that the curtains billowed, or to be more exact, a young woman parted them in order to enter. From the door, she announced:

"*Un modèle, Monsieur.*"

Then she revolved, advanced, and smiled. From the ripple of discreet laughter I realized that this was a traditional joke to pass the time of waiting. I heard remarks like:

"She really must be taught to walk properly."

"You see, *ma petite*. . ."

This last was greeted with a real gale of laughter. Obviously it was one of the favorite expressions of the absent master. As a witticism it was a riotous success.

Around me, the spectacle was being readied. The rows of chairs were being filled, with the exception of several armchairs in the middle, which obviously corresponded to those of the *Presidencia* at the Plaza del Toros in Madrid. The illusion of a bullfight was completed by the entry of a valet, who at first was enveloped in the inevitable curtain; he placed about ten clattering umbrellas on the table with the jewels, and then disappeared, fair, pink and silent. Christian Dior's own seat was recognizable by a peculiar installation: two pockets of beige cloth were attached to the left and right of the armchair. My neighbor informed me that these were for pencils and erasers. In front of his chair, on a stool were two long pieces of paper and six pencils, sharpened like daggers. On the seat of the chair was a baton with a gold band.

I expected to read "Christian Dior" on the back of the chair, as one reads "René Clair" on the back of a chair in a motion-picture studio. But there was nothing like that—only the rather unexpected inscription "Noémie" on the stool. My neighbor, consulted once more, burst out laughing, and realized that I was definitely an outside. "Noémie," she told me, was simply the name of the worker from whom this stool had been borrowed. Disconcerted, I took refuge in silence.

It was extremely hot; outside, under the chestnut trees in the avenue Montaigne, the sidewalk was steaming. I heard one of the

women say threateningly to another: "No cold beer for you until eight o'clock this evening!"

My watch said 1:45. One clever, foresighted man had lined up on the mantelpiece, within reach of his fingers, three packs of cigarettes, pads of paper, pencils and matches. Somebody remarked: "We shan't be through until midnight."

They were all settling themselves in as though for a long journey. At the same time, people continued to scuttle to and fro, performing some secret rite whose rules escaped me. Then a lady of commanding presence, magnificently dressed, hatted, and bejeweled, aroused general enthusiasm by her appearance.

"Hat by Bricard!" somebody cried. "Model by Bricard! Coiffure by Bricard! Dress by Bricard! Shoes by Bricard! Elegance by Bricard!"

Surely the show was about to begin. The person responsible for this flattering commotion disappeared as rapidly as she had come, only to reappear, an instant later, just as beautifully dressed, a little blue veil over her eyes, but this time wearing an open-necked short-sleeved white blouse. She sat down in front of me, and I discovered with astonishment an inscription on her collar as puzzling as the word "Noémie" on the stool: the blouse was marked *Gloire*. Obviously, I still had much to learn about the intricacies of the dress trade.

Now a girl came in, pushing before her an apparatus on wheels from some other age, which was also enveloped in a white cloth. It looked like an ancient camera. Was it being made ready to project a film on one of the many screens in the room?

"Boutonnette," as everyone called her, lifted the cover; there was nothing beneath it but an array of buttons like a display of picture postcards. Now, amid a rustling of materials and chairs, there was another sign that the show was about to begin.

Le patron (as Christian Dior is always called within the precincts of 30, avenue Montaigne) came into the room.

An affectionate murmur of relief from the assembled company followed him to his chair. He smiled, shook several hands, kissed several cheeks, took up his baton, and settled down. He too was

wearing a white smock. Now everything seemed simple; there were exactly the right number of chairs and people, and each one of the spectators occupied a place which he or she felt was his own. At last a tall boy in working clothes lifted the white curtain and announced:

"Un modèle, Monsieur!"

As if in response, another voice declaimed the words:

"San Francisco!"

And a mannequin appeared. She advanced, walked around the room with that elegant balanced movement so completely unlike a soldier's march and came to a standstill. As this was the opening number, I felt that it would probably be of comparatively minor importance, in the nature of a curtain-raiser, but at the same time prophetic of the new line. I tried to make out what the line was going to be.

Christian Dior said softly: "It needs a different hat, something altogether more striking. Now what exactly, I wonder?"

Now that my attention was directed toward it, I found that I had not even noticed before that there was a hat. Immobile in the center of the salon, the mannequin gazed into space at a point which, according to experts, is about at the roots of the spectators' hairline. At the same time, the guardian of the jewels, the two keepers of the hats and a fourth assistant sprang to life. The first fastened on an earring, the second and third wreathed round her head a mass of black taffeta on a foundation of canvas, and a vaporous veil. Under the impact of these simultaneous attacks the mannequin blinked. Finally somebody placed the finished piece on top of her head. There were murmurs of approval saluting this collective effort. But it was still not good enough.

From his seat, Christian Dior observed: "The flower should be larger."

Mme Bricard demanded a less important veil; Mme Marguerite called for black ribbon. One after the other they were tried, in different combinations. The mannequin, apparently made of stone, did at last let out a faint murmur when a piece of tulle ruffled her eyelashes.

"Don't tug me about like that!" she exclaimed.

Finally Dior himself stood up, patted the vast edifice, moved the pins, transformed the whole thing, and returned to his seat, murmuring: "There now, that looks very pretty. You will please add two large jet hatspins."

Now at last, I saw the point of this so-called dress rehearsal; it was nothing but a delightful private party, for the express purpose of decorating a Christmas tree. The boxes on the floor contained the traditional crystal balls, and lights and stars. The mannequin was the elegant, silent, splendidly indifferent tree. Everyone took part in the sumptuous preparations; the two hatters hovered with darting agile fingers around her head while the jeweler juggled earrings and necklaces. "Boutonnette" brandished her array of buttons of every size and color. The fur-bearers offered their capes and coats with outstretched arms.

I thought each dress was finished, accepted beyond discussion. I was mistaken. The very next model, called *Virevolte*, exploded my theory about what was going on. The girl entered, did the little detached, almost insolent, dance step which goes with the presentation of a dress, and then stood still.

After a long reflective pause, Dior's baton indicated a spot, somewhere on the neckline, and he said very distinctly: "Really, I find that very unattractive."

Mme Marguerite stood up, followed by a man who was presumably the head of the workroom responsible for the execution of the dress. Pins were brandished, one hand pulled the dress to the left, another slid underneath it. The shoulders were pulled up, and the hem of the jacket was pinned. Without a single downward glance at all this corrective labor, the mannequin seemed to be directing all her thoughts elsewhere.

She sprang to life only when she was left once more to her imperial isolation; then a smile returned to her lips. Dior approved the changes.

"Now it's just right. . . . Yes, I like that!"

But it was obvious that he was still not quite satisfied. Something was still lacking. Restored to her elegant liberty, the manne-

quin glided forward and pirouetted around. Suddenly Dior motioned to her to stand still.

"I know what it is," he exclaimed. "It needs two more buttons! Boutonnettel!"

Wobbling slightly, the chariot was propelled forward. One, two, three, four, *five* black buttons, all absolutely identical to my inexperienced gaze, were tried in turn. The sixth was finally considered satisfactory. Two pins, corresponding to the two new buttons, were placed, with almost insane precision, on the jacket. Finally, after one last pirouette, *Virevolte* left us. She had just reached the door, when a final command was flung after her.

"Add a black umbrella!"

The mannequins continued to file past. Every dress that appeared brought up a particular problem; sometimes it was the dress itself, sometimes the hat, the muff or the jewelry. Occasionally—accompanied by a flattering murmur, and whispers of "It's wonderful"—a perfectly executed model would sail through, without any alterations.

Dior did not detain the girl except to murmur: "Oh, how pretty! You couldn't hope to see a better-dressed woman! Or a more elegant one!"

Time passed. The ashtrays filled up with cigarette butts marked with lipstick; the peppermints had resumed their guilty rounds; the artists were making quick but accurate sketches. It was then that I noticed the procession of slips of paper. They came from the jewelry table, where the telephone occasionally buzzed, and circulated apparently of their own volition. The low-voiced telephone girl was sending them from hand to hand to their destination. The answer came back by the same route and the girl transmitted the gist of it to whoever was on the other end. If there was a delay between the appearance of two models, the message route was crossed by a procession of nougat bars coming from some indefinable source, as if borne on the backs of ants. Once the bars had been distributed, another problem arose—how to dispose of the cellophane which contained the nougat. Taking it off involved a sudden sharp crackle, quickly stifled but echoed elsewhere

in the room by another attempt. The sound of mouselike nibbles was accompanied by murmurs of boredom. The Patron gazed at his staff impatiently.

"Right? Everybody ready now? Roger? Claire?"

Finally, somebody chose a heroic solution and offered a nougat to Dior himself, which at least had the effect of removing his frown. Scarcely had he taken it—with a grateful smile—than a concert of rustling paper broke out. The tension broken, the announcer cried:

"Un modèle, Monsieur."

The rhythm of the show was restored. The mannequin slipped off her jacket and let it hang gracefully at her fingertips. Remarks began to fly:

"That bow should be more functional. It doesn't seem to fasten to anything."

"Away with the fur! It clashes with the hat."

"Look out, the skirt dips to the left and the petticoat is showing. Jeanne, go and sit on the little stool, then you'll see what I mean."

"The hat is not quite sensational enough. Add a mass of black veiling."

"Frédéric, your collar is not sufficiently stiff."

Dior said to an assistant who was busy curving in the crown of a hat: "No, leave it as it is."

And he asked Mme Bricard, who was sitting beside him: "What's that little thing you've got in your hand? Yes, that. Give it to me."

"You can't do that," she exclaimed.

"Oh yes I can."

The object now adorned the hat. Gloves were tried over and over again, and umbrellas put up and down and up again. Finally they were abandoned in favor of a muff. Mme Bricard uttered axioms as pointed as the banderillas of a bullfight.

"That one is too formal. Double the veiling. Not that one, another. No, the black one."

One of the dresses underwent a series of drastic criticisms from

the moment it came into the room. There was obviously too much to do, so it was sent back.

"I'll look at it tomorrow," said Dior. "It is the last time I shall see these dresses, so I ought to look at them properly."

Another time, the choice of a hat seemed to drag on forever. In order to justify his demands, Dior explained politely: "It is not so much a question of the hat itself, but the proportions of the whole outfit."

On another occasion, a mannequin was rudely stung to life beneath our eyes. The girl was showing a suit of russet and orange with majestic slowness, whereupon the conductor of the orchestra waved his baton to indicate: "Step up your pace!"

The mannequin's lips visibly trembled; her statuesque isolation had been shattered. She reacted with the traditional smile, but before she left the salon Dior was careful to reassure her: "Don't worry. You were first-rate."

As the hours wore on, attitudes became easier. A gentle fatigue descended over the faces of the mannequins, who were all warmly dressed, since the collection was a season in advance of the thermometer. On all sides, notes were being scribbled on large sheets of paper:

"Have you made a note of the diamonds in the ears? . . . Five rows of jet. . . . The beaver muff. . . . The one Alla was wearing. . . ."

Occasionally, rarely, Christian Dior himself would cry out:

"That name is really impossible. Ladies, give me a name."

It was a question of christening or unchristening a dress. About one of the more fantastic names, Dior said with a smile:

"If anybody asks you why it is called that, say you don't know, because, really, I haven't the faintest idea."

As the show went on, I heard the words "*les femmes*" constantly used to make some point. Every profession has a way of designating its clients. In the world of fashion, they are simply *les femmes*, the women.

"The women won't like that," says someone. "The women

will wear that one on one side. . . . That is very slimming, the women will look well in that."

This term, "the women," has a sort of universality about it; it is pronounced with a mixture of respect and love.

About six o'clock, I took advantage of the stepped-up activity aroused by a wedding dress—there is always one in every collection—and silently pushed aside two deserted chairs, crossed the salon and slipped out behind the white curtains. In the avenue Montaigne, the sun was shining. Having just left such a snowy scene I found the women who passed paradoxically summery. I felt a sudden mad desire to buttonhole them and say, "No, that lapel will not do at all! It's far too long."

At the same time, I felt a certain pride. I was the repository of a secret that in a few weeks time would transform the most elegant of the women who were passing. I cast one more backward glance toward the windows of the house, behind which I knew that the showing would go on for several hours, until night fell and the first stars came out. Until, in fact, that moment of inspiration and exhaustion which authors and comedians both experience on the eve of a battle, when they feel at the same time drained of everything and miraculously enriched.

* * *

THE EVE OF THE BATTLE

NOW COMES the christening of the new line. It takes place in the three days separating the dress rehearsal from the opening. I draw up the press release, describing the season's trend in as precise and unliterary language as possible. In order to hit on the title, the emblem which will crown the new fashions, I give myself over to last-minute inspiration. I arrive at the name that synthesizes the tendency of the day by thinking in terms of the most conspicuous, eccentric silhouette of the collection. Obviously, no designer is inspired by a rosebud or a string bean! But he must cater to the modern taste for a slogan.

In spring, 1955, for example, I picked on the fullness in the skirts of certain of the models and isolated the letter A, which succeeded the letter H of the preceding season. The letter Y indicated the lengthening of the skirt, the slimming of the waist, and the high position of the bust. But every collection consists of a great variety of themes, and one letter—A, H, or Y—cannot represent them all. So whatever the name with which the collection is christened, I write about four pages to indicate the main trends of the season. I try to write as soberly as possible, but how can one avoid altogether the traps of the language of fashion? I am afraid I always end up by falling into them. After enumerating the principal characteristics of the new fashion, I detail those of the accessories including trimmings, hats, furs, belts, jewelry,

foundation garments, buttons, gloves, umbrellas, shoes, stockings, and hair styles.

Meanwhile the workrooms are in a positive fever of last-minute activity. They are now on the eve of the ordeal for which they have been preparing for the past four trying months. Out comes the basting and in goes the solid stitching that enables a dress to hold its shape. This is also the moment when models that one had definitely decided to eliminate have a way of reappearing. From time to time they come before us, interrupting my work as a fashion journalist, trying to creep back into favor. Sometimes it is the mannequin and sometimes the *première* that sponsors their return to grace. I have yielded many times, and congratulated myself for it later on, when models whose future I tried to blight, like an unnatural father, have gone forward to a glorious career. Severity for its own sake is quite as dangerous as an excess of indulgence.

But at the point where I am now, I don't see the dresses any more. They have passed before my eyes too many times, occupied my thoughts too much, for me to judge them impartially any longer. The whole collection seems unfinished to me and, although 170 models have been listed, I have the sensation of having done nothing, or to be more exact, having accomplished nothing.

To gain reassurance, I reserve for myself the task of drawing up the charts which are hung over the dressing table of each mannequin on the day of the show. These charts contain the number and name of each dress, followed by a brief description and the detailed list of the accessories, all indispensable references to the dresser.

The order of the show is also indicated on the charts; it obeys certain fixed laws of precedence. First come the suits, then the town dresses, then the more formal outfits, the cock-

tail dresses, the short evening dresses, finally the long evening dresses and the ball gowns, which are generally spectacularly embroidered. A wedding dress ends the show. But to give the classic order a certain dramatic quality, one sometimes includes certain town dresses or particularly striking suits among the cocktail dresses. As for the shock troops, those startling models which are the symbols of the new line, they are distributed toward the middle of the show. It is these "Trafalgars" that make the covers or important pages of the magazines. These are the models that determine the fashion of today and also that of tomorrow. In the middle of the show, they recapture the wandering attention of the audience.

These "Trafalgars" have a curious fate. Perhaps some of them will never be worn in real life. Others will have their success "late in life" and will first come into their own in the next collection. Others will be so quickly adopted, worn and lived in, that six months later people will wonder what was so extraordinary about them.

In drawing up the program of the collection, I pull my ideas into shape not so much for the benefit of the public, whose reactions remain marvelously unpredictable, but for myself. I cannot feel satisfied if I have made any concessions. At this late stage, I have been known to eliminate several more models whose sales appeal was certain but whose intrinsic interest was not evident. On these dresses I write "Not for the Press," and take them out of the first showing, which is always too long.

All this does not take place without tears and protestations. Alla, usually impassive and hieratic, stalks into my office like tragedy itself. She does not even have to speak; one glance from those eyes, half Slav, half Manchurian, tells me the worst.

"You want your dress put back?"

"Oh, please, Monsieur Dior. It's one of the best."

"Don't you think, Alla, that it's rather like a suit you wore in the last collection?"

"Monsieur, I'm sure it will be a success."

After all, isn't this my first reaction from the public? Alla is a woman, she loves clothes and—which is not to be overlooked—she really understands them. I am now three-quarters of the way toward being convinced. The return of Alla, wearing the dress in question, makes up my mind. Nevertheless, despite the wiles of mannequins and *premières* in defending their own clothes (I know all their different ruses), the interests of the collection must come first; its unity has to be preserved jealously if its significance is not to be lost.

By now the building has become a real anthill. Indeed, the apprentices I find scuttling about the corridors, laden with boxes or material, actually remind me very much of ants. Because they are so conscientiously busy, they pass one another without exchanging a single word. If one of them drops a piece of material, another stoops to pick it up. Boys in white smocks scurry by with tape measures around their necks. Workmen arrive to mend some of the gold chairs; then comes the painter who is to touch up the silver letters over the entrance. This incessant traffic is particularly amazing, because it all seems to be going one way. The inhabitants of the house are so accustomed to labyrinthine passages that they take one staircase to go up and another one to come down. Astonished visitors wonder what secret machinery enables the same people to pass before their eyes four times within a quarter of an hour.

My staff has put on the vigilant and serious air proper to the acolytes of an important ceremony. The mannequins, who throughout the year hang around in laughing groups, now

walk down the corridors leading to the big salon wearing frowns and a noticeable air of absorption.

For my own part I no longer have time to say to them: "How are you, my dear?" or: "Not too tired, I hope, little one."

Our publicity department, in its turn, burdens me with its worries. The showing of a collection has this in common with the opening of a play: the first contact with the opinion of specialists has an exceptional importance. I believe it is fair to say that fashion writers generally know their business better than theater critics. But this does not stop a couturier from brooding over his collection with the terror of an author whose play is about to face the batteries of the first night. Twice a year I have to endure this terrible torment. Some people find it adds piquancy to the game. Personally, I hate it, just as I used to hate examinations. My friends, in order to comfort me, keep up the pretense that this appalling hurdle constitutes the best defense against growing old. And I pretend to believe them. . . .

As the great day draws near, the nerve center of the building shifts from the studio to the salon. The publicity department becomes the heart which beats out unrest into the general blood stream; Messieurs de Maussabré and Donati move down one floor to cope with the special circumstances of the opening. They are battling with Homeric problems of precedence: into two rooms and a landing, they have to squeeze 300 people, when, allowing a narrow corridor for the mannequins, there is at most space for 250. A justly inflexible and complicated protocol determines the precedence of one guest over another; and it is in fact our dearest and most intimate friends who find themselves relegated to the doorways, corners and staircases. Even if it is blocked by a hat or a shoulder, a friend's eye is indulgent. At least—so we hope!

The exact placing of each seat is a study in itself. There are the habitués, whom any change will mortally offend; the writers who have switched from one paper to another; friends who have fallen out from one season to the next; papers which have either sprung into existence since the last collection or else grown in importance. Each journalist must have the place appropriate both to the importance of the paper for which he writes and to his personal prestige. Even so, the seating plan sometimes has to be modified because of unforeseen circumstances. For example, an American agency once added this charming postscript to its usual request for a place:

"Mrs. X. would like to have a comfortable armchair in the small salon, near the exit, because she is expecting a baby at about the same time as your collection is due to be shown, and she would like to be able to leave the salon easily, without disturbing anyone else, in case of an emergency."

Although some of the guests ask for places on the staircase, because they are subject to claustrophobia, on the whole it is the first row of seats in the grand salon which are the most sought after. In order to please everybody, the publicity department has to know how to say "no" politely in every language.

In my office the pink slips of paper that help me to set the prices of the clothes are beginning to pile up. It may surprise my readers to learn that I personally fix the prices, when as a rule I have nothing to do with the administrative or sales side of the business. But the price of a dress is of fundamental importance. Every model is the subject of a detailed file, stating the hours of work spent on it, the cost of the work done by hand, and the price of the material. By adding to this a percentage of the overhead, taxes and the necessary profit, one gets a very good idea of the price at which the dress ought to be sold.

But these prices, although fairly calculated, are not necessarily right. An apparently insignificant dress may have taken far longer to make than another that is far more striking. Since a dress ought to be sold as far as possible at a price which corresponds to its appearance, I have to lower the commercial price of the one, and increase that of the other. Little wool dresses, casual or sport models, very often involve the greatest sacrifices. One can hardly ask a great price for them, yet making them—particularly when they are pleated—is one of the most laborious of our tasks. How can we convince our clients that “a casual little day dress” needs as much care and attention as a sensationally draped and tucked ball gown?

With prices set, publicity under control, the collection christened, the final fittings accomplished, the last evening before the opening—the “eve of the battle”—arrives at last. Nerves are on edge, and we are all at the end of our wits. The last hours preceding the ceremony see two opposing tendencies. One, panic: nothing will be ready, everything will go wrong, we are on the verge of a catastrophe. The other, optimism, or at the very least, fatalism: for it is too late to do anything about it.

I ask several friends to rally around and support me during the evening. They come to my studio and sit around on stools and chairs. The lamps by the mirrors shine brightly. The last embroidered dresses arrive in pieces, and are hastily put together. The mannequins, dazed with fatigue, don them quickly, and begin to turn slowly around in front of the mirrors, like moths caught in the halo of light that stings our tired eyes. I look at Renée, wilting a little. Her smile is becoming more and more strained but one last detail has to be altered before the fitting is finished. Like me, she will stick it out. When she vanishes, when the last pin has been inserted, Claire takes her place. Once more she must try on the wedding dress,

which is the climax of the collection. For some years she has had this role, and I expect her to play it even when she is a grandmother, for she is the personification of a young bride.

Now the last-minute dresses begin to arrive; these are the models which have been planned after the dress rehearsal, either to accentuate a predominant trend, or to fill in a gap in the program. They are real miracle dresses. I have known them to be designed one evening and to be made ready—against insuperable odds—by the morning after.

It is also the turn of the last-chance dresses. Victoire comes in as if about to join in the battle. The very way in which she wears the contested model shows that she has sworn to return triumphant. Relying on her pert smile and unmistakably modern figure, she traces a pirouette designed to put an end to all hesitation.

As the hours pass, fatal weariness creeps over me. Harassed, dried up of all ideas, I have to keep my attention rigid until the last dress has been passed. Piles of sandwiches and cakes circulate, and glasses of red wine. Curiously enough, I am gradually pervaded by a sense of well-being, born of exhaustion, doubts too long entertained, and the happiness of being among my fellow workers. Only essential comments are pronounced. Despite fatigue, we savor the sensation of having brought a joint labor to a triumphant conclusion. But it is not yet done; there are still a few more models to be inspected—there always seems to be one more “last one”—and we all have to sit down again.

About three o'clock in the morning, we bid each other affectionate farewells. Unutterably weary, with restless minds but quiet consciences, we can at least feel that we have done our best.

THE SHOWING OF THE
COLLECTION

I USUALLY FIND it very difficult to wake up, but it is no hardship on this particular morning, in spite of the hour I went to bed last night. I want to be at the avenue Montaigne as early as possible. It is usually beautiful golden August weather when we show the winter collection, and outside number 30, Paris is in the full bloom of summer. I stop outside the house a moment in order to gaze at the façade and reflect on the spectacle which will so soon start. I am impatient to see the grand salon, which is still empty but suggests the presences that will shortly fill the rows and rows of gilded chairs. The flowers attract my attention. I am too fond of them not to take this opportunity of indulging my particular whims; I ask for a rose here, a carnation there. Farther on, I have a stained armchair removed, and I pick a forgotten thread from the carpet. Robert de Maussabré advances across the salon to pour into my ears the history of the latest drama which has forced him to alter his seating arrangements still once more. I calm him, and go down to the Boutique.

There, also, work has gone on all through the night. When I had left to go home in the early hours of the morning, I had already seen a rough outline of what was going to be done, and now I give several pieces of advice and encouragement. I find all the workers there now, exhausted, but above all anxious to know if I approve of what they have done. As in the case of the flowers, I ask for several little changes of detail.

“Not enough color!”

"Pull out some more scarves!"

Trying to look at everything at once, I rush hither and yon, dropping remarks over my shoulder:

"Move the dummy that's blocking that window full of gloves!"

"Why did you put a dark dress near the door? You want a light one there instead."

All the time I am trying to enliven the scene. The opening of a collection is a party; the decoration should suggest gaiety and fantasy—down to the aroma of the rooms.

"Spray some more perfume!"

By now it is nine o'clock. Through the window I can see the street and the chestnut trees, dappled by the sun. Cars are beginning to line up at the curb, and groups of people are forming outside the doors as friends recognize and hail one another. Laughter and greetings fill the air, before the guests finally decide to come inside. All our visitors have been obliging enough to get up very early this morning to come to watch the show, in a season when everybody else is on vacation. I am grateful to them—but heavens, how they terrify me!

In the studio three or four models await me, models on which the girls have been putting finishing touches since six o'clock this morning. These are generally coats, intended to complete an ensemble, or the famous embroidered ball dresses, which always arrive late. Inspecting them helps me to kill time, until the grim moment when I have to face my inquisitors. Finished at last! I can change nothing more.

When the first guest enters the hall, he sets in motion, all unknown to him, a meticulous timetable which ends only when the complete collection has been shown. In the dressing room, warned by messengers, the bustle, and the noise of scraping chairs, the mannequins start to quiver.

"Are they arriving already?"

Between the world of the salon and that backstage, there exists one ultimate point of contact: that of emotion, which spreads like a flash from one to the other. But before this complicity can take place, the two camps are content to observe each other suspiciously. I keep apart and ask myself over and over again:

"Have I created enough that's really new?"

"Is this novelty really 'wearable'?"

"Are the models sufficiently striking?"

In fact, I am no longer capable of judging. The most exacting and capricious jury in the world is assembling on the floor below to conduct my trial. Should I plead guilty? The game has now passed out of my hands, into those of my mannequins, who must henceforth plead my case. It is the mission of my dresses to make them as beautiful as possible, that is, as eloquent as possible. It is they, in fact, who will bear witness to my character. My friends, realizing that I am undergoing the sufferings of a prisoner, come to comfort me in the dock. As they are themselves in a state of tension comparable to mine, the smiles we exchange would fool nobody.

It is a quarter to ten. In the hall, someone is spraying a cloud of perfume in the path of the guests, and on the second floor the publicity department, posted at the bottom of the stairs, is distributing programs of the show.

In the mannequins' dressing room, complete confusion seems to reign. How on earth could it be otherwise? In a space habitually reserved for twelve mannequins and the directress, Mme de Turckheim, are now crammed Mme Marguerite, ten dressers, all the *premières* and tailors, three hair-dressers, my two immediate assistants, and naturally the girls themselves. Around them are milling the workers who have brought down the dresses, and young men brandishing ac-

cessories. Try to stuff them all in, even motionless, and you could never do it. But bustling to and fro, carrying models, jewels or combs, kissing each other on the cheek, pulling each other about, they somehow all manage to fit in. I see it happen every opening day with fresh amazement.

When I arrive, the girls, in their long white smocks, are still in the midst of doing their hair, or making up. Most people imagine that behind the scenes of a dressmaking establishment there is a perpetual strip tease. In reality, the austerity is even greater than behind the curtain of the theater, and untidiness is forbidden. The girls do not take off their smocks until the moment when they don their dresses, and the fugitive glimpses of their figures in girdle and brassière is no different from that which they would offer on a most elegant beach. On their faces, all traces of fatigue have disappeared as if by magic. They have never looked more beautiful; they have the radiance of brides, because for six weeks they have been working up to this day. It is their duty to conquer and convince the audience, show them the new fashion, and impose it upon them.

Victoire gets ready with the studied gravity of Iphigenia preparing herself for the sacrifice. Lucky concentrates intensely; for her, every entrance into the salon implies a metamorphosis. Sitting down, she may look worn out from overwork; standing, she looks dazzling and splendid. Lucky is fashion itself brought to life; she can make a comedy or a tragedy out of a dress, as she chooses. In one corner Lia industriously paints her slightly freckled face, pouting like a little girl. Somebody comes in with the news that the first important guests have arrived. Immediately, all the mirrors reflect attentive figures, concentrating entirely on the task of beautifying themselves.

Laden with flowers, illuminated by chandeliers and flood-

lights, the salons begin to fill up. The whole scene has an aspect at once lighthearted and worldly, quite different from that found at a first night in the theater. Here, there is no impressive red curtain, no armchairs drawn up in a neat line to convey the idea of a dramatic performance. The Louis XVI chairs, in spite of their numbered cards, are obviously arranged to watch some drawing room comedy.

In the dressing room, the telephone rings without stopping. Mme Marguerite is demanding the missing models from the workrooms. This has happened every season since I opened my house. Every season I try to insure that all the models are brought down the evening before the show and hung up in the wardrobe. In vain, and I am sure I shall never succeed! The *premières* consent to release their cherished children only at the very last moment. The night before, they were left on the wicker dummies in the silence and darkness of the workrooms. There, they still belonged to them; below, the *premières* have the irrational feeling that they will be taken away from them. Their emotions strike a sympathetic chord in my own heart; like them I always feel a certain regret and irritation over the destiny of these dresses. After so much loving care has been poured into them, they are to be shriveled up under the heat of the floodlights. From this evening onward, they will be thrown about, scorned, even trampled under foot. I am powerless to prevent it, but all the same it upsets me. For that reason, with certain rare exceptions, I have never wished to see my collection again after the first day of its presentation to the public. I am frightened of meeting my old friends the models again, after contact with life, the public, and commerce have transformed them. They have grown too far away from me.

The salon is full and the staircase is filling up. Spectators are crowded onto the very last step from which, by craning

their necks, they can see the top of a hat worn by Victoire or the whole face of a taller mannequin. From above, by looking through the wrought-iron railing, you can make out a complete figure if you occupy one of the first steps, the hem of a ball dress from the upper steps, and if the worst comes to the worst, the tip of a shoe. The stairs have to be moderately empty to be comfortable. Half an hour before the show, two people are seated comfortably side by side on each step; but twenty minutes later, they have disappeared beneath a sea of new arrivals. The staircase begins to look like an overloaded boat, close to sinking. The privileged members of my staff have their places, some of them are on chairs on the small landing, others in the recesses of the windows, the remainder scattered about anywhere they can find an inch of space. At the very top of the staircase can be spied a white cloud of smocked apprentices, who have temporarily escaped the watchful vigilance of the head of their workroom.

It is 10:25 A.M.

I send down word to Mme Raymonde to ask what state the salon is in. I want to know if the most important guests—those without whom the show cannot go on—have arrived yet. She sends back a message to say yes, they are there. In the twinkling of an eye, the mannequins are ready. In a fever, they arrange themselves in battle order in the narrow corridor leading to the first salon. Feeling is intense in the dressing room, and I think it communicates itself to the audience. Neither side knows how things are going to turn out. A gentle hiss is the discreet signal by which Mme Raymonde indicates to the first mannequin that she can start the procession. From the shelter of my curtain, I commend them to Providence!

This is the moment—after the mannequin has put on the dress and before she appears in the bright circle of lights in the salon—when for the first and last time I am able to dis-

cover the significance of my clothes. However tired I am, this fleeting moment practically always brings me happiness. The girl and the dress have never seemed dearer to me. The ultimate fate of the model is still wrapped in mystery, but I am amply repaid for all my worry and exhaustion by seeing my dream come to life beneath my eyes.

Where will success come from? I cannot foresee it. Will it appear on the road I hoped—that of newness and true inspiration? Or else, just the opposite, will the public reject the models I like most and applaud others? Or then again, will the public remain indifferent? That would really be the catastrophe which has so often haunted my dreams.

There sits the public, watchful, curious, capable of being carried away by enthusiasm or disappointment. People are standing up and waving at friends at the other end of the salon, and late-comers are looking for programs. Candies are being handed around. A girl makes her way among the close-packed chairs and distributes fans; cigarettes are lit.

When the first mannequin enters, by some miracle everyone is sitting down and there is actually silence. From the door, the announcer gives the number and name of the model, and repeats the number in English:

"Numéro quatorze. Ecosse. Fourteen."

The mannequin walks across the salon, turns, threads her way through the narrow space between the chairs, and leaves for the petit salon. There at the entrance, a second announcer repeats the name and number. The announcement echoes a third time on the landing:

"Numéro quatorze. Ecosse. Fourteen."

Behind the gray curtain we are in anguish, and the first twenty minutes generally pass in a silence heavy with mingled hope and anxiety. I scarcely dare ask the girls what effect they have produced. But eventually I gain courage from their

air of satisfaction and dare to pose several leading questions. They answer positively. "Oh yes, Monsieur Dior, that one was a *great* success."

Or: "It certainly created a stir."

But I do not really breathe again until the first mannequin has received applause. That produces a legitimate smile of satisfaction; I kiss the girl concerned on both cheeks, and I think the whole group of mannequins feel like doing the same—even though they are supposed to be her rivals. However, one swallow does not make a summer, and it needs several salvos of applause to constitute genuine enthusiasm. Then the tempo quickens.

As they change, the mannequins toss off bulletins of progress:

"They're going for them now."

"That time I got a big hand!"

Trembling, I try to pin them down to more precise descriptions: "Would you say it was going as well as the last Collection?"

With their voices muffled by skirts, the girls hastily reassure me. To tell the truth they had had scarcely any chance to gauge the reactions of the public in the course of showing their numbers. That is why their reports are rather vague:

"I think they're getting warm."

I remember getting an extraordinary report from France, one of my first mannequins, who has since left to get married. She sat down, crossed her long legs in front of her and said in her slow, little girl's voice, with disconcerting directness:

"That was a wow! I really vamped them!"

To her this was evident and before long her thoughts were concentrated on her makeup and nothing else. Of course not all the dresses are a success; the mannequins' reactions to failure vary. Tania, who was subject to mercurial changes in

humor, refused to admit defeat. When she returned from the salon, she used to curse in Russian at clients so incapable of appreciating a good dress when they saw one. You knew she would have liked to scratch their eyes out! But in most cases the mannequin silently and speedily changes her dress, impatient to get back to the salon and have her revenge.

Sometimes a last-minute disaster gives us all a fright. With shaking hands, we stick in a multitude of pins, hoping to hide from the eye of the public the unforgivable scandal of a dipping hem line. We watch the model go without daring to hope for too much. My closest assistant hands an umbrella to the mannequin; I hastily twine a scarf around her neck, intended to draw the attention of the examiners away from the hem—and the model is ready to go before the jury. Mme Raymond's heart misses a beat when she sees the skirt dipping dangerously below the coat, but fortunately she seems to be the only one to notice.

The mannequin walks forward, turns, slips off her jacket to her fingertips and lets it hang for a moment; suddenly, there is a round of applause. It may be the magic of the color or the neckline which has aroused it; in any case, the public is blind to our sin, which was, after all, only venial.

There is such glamour about the atmosphere of a show that the spectators have been known to applaud a dress of which only one half had been embroidered, and which all unknown to them had had to be hastily redesigned to cover up the catastrophe. A simple black dress has not the same power of suggestion; it arouses less immediate enthusiasm but triumphs by its very austerity in the long run.

Provided everything goes well, it is at about the thirtieth model that one begins to get the feel of the salon. Mme Raymonde leaves her observation post for an instant and comes to give me the news in the dressing room:

"Oh *patron, patron*, I think everything is going to be all right."

Knowing how careful she is to reassure me the first instant it is possible to do so without being overly optimistic, I begin to take courage, only to lose it again twenty times before the end of the show.

Mme Raymonde knows the salon by heart: she can distinguish the different kinds of applause—that of the journalists from that of the friends of the house. The first comes from people who are at work then and there in the salon. Before letting themselves show enthusiasm over a model, they must register their appreciation in their notebooks. The second type of applause is more spontaneous, even if it carries less weight. Nevertheless, both types give us pleasure.

With her eyes closed, Mme Raymonde can describe the exact response to each dress received with enthusiasm; she will say, for example, about the grosgrain suit with the full skirt, that the big salon applauded it, the little salon took up the applause, and the staircase was delirious. She could write a thesis, "Applause in Relation to Fashion Design," which would consider the subject from the modest claps accorded a tailored suit to the tumultuous cheers at the end of the show, not forgetting the thunderous applause given to an elaborate ball dress.

She is also an expert in interpreting the buzz of conversation. She knows that it is made up of exclamations, both admiring and critical, and she knows that chatter accompanying the appearance of a mannequin is a bad sign, as it betokens a slackening of interest. On the other hand, if it comes after the applause of the experts, it prolongs and confirms their enthusiasm. Mme Raymonde's experienced hand is also seen in the applause in my honor which she literally pulls from the audience at the end of the show. Some of my

friends think it rather vulgar, inferior in quality to attentive silence; but for my own part, I must confess that I appreciate it tremendously.

Toward the middle of the show, a wave of lassitude runs through the salons. For half an hour, the fate of the collection has been taking shape. The press knows the new line by now and is getting used to seeing it in action. Women find relief in powdering their noses; for some reason, all of them seem to be seized with the idea at the same time. For sixty minutes they have been quite happy as spectators; suddenly they remember that they are there not only to see but to be seen. They pat their noses stealthily like criminals, and cover up what they consider to be blemishes. One lights a cigarette; another makes sure that her bag is still beside her. Knees and legs uncurl; skirts are pulled into shape. A guest slips on the shoe which she had discreetly slipped off a short time before.

All these details are reported to me in pantomime, for I never enter the salon. Mme Raymonde passes me a note, on which is penciled the simple word:

"Faster!"

And I realize that we must quicken the pace.

It is a quarter to twelve. In the dressing room, agitation is at its height. For several minutes, Mme Raymonde has been concentrating especially on the order of the show; she worries over one mannequin who is lagging behind, or another who has jumped her place in the line—moved ahead of her companions. The fateful moment when we must switch from day dresses to evening dresses has arrived.

The *coiffeurs* dance a ballet around the mannequins, who, like all women in the grip of their hairdressers, see and hear nothing. The girls are all clamoring for false chignons, and I have to wait until after the mannequins are out of the hairdressers' hands to collect them. Thirstily Renée demands a

glass of water and swallows it on the landing, where she runs no risk of spilling it on her dress. They fight over the dressers, and interrupt each other. I chase away several seamstresses who have no business to be in the dressing room.

"Ladies, will you please take yourselves off?"

The first ball gowns literally descend. They are dropped down from the gallery which surrounds the dressing room, and float gently onto the heads of those below, sometimes imprisoning someone completely. There are cries of protest and shrieks of laughter. As the mannequins line up to enter the salon, a little seamstress whispers treacherously from above:

"What a pity! My dress being worn by Magda! Jeanne would have looked so much better in it."

I rise up in fury.

"Will you come down from there, you miserable little gremlin?"

Short evening dresses, full length sheaths, full-skirted dresses, finally the ball dresses, incrustated with embroidery—I myself decide this order in which they are to be shown, rather as a fireworks expert launches the various pieces of his repertory. My mannequins sally forth like a brilliant armada, all sails flying, off to conquer the world in the cause of the new fashion.

It is time for Claire to put on the wedding dress which completes the show. She is a born mannequin and adores her job. She has been married for several years, but of all my girls she is the one best fitted to play the part of the young bride. It is a difficult role, and has a superstition attached to it. The girls who work at the dress sew a lock of their own hair into the hem in order to find a husband during the coming year. The mannequins, though, claim that it is unlucky to wear the dress, saying that the girl who shows it will never be a bride in real life.

The mannequins are returning from the salons for the last time. Their gloves are stripped off, their jewels returned to their cases, and they collapse, exhausted, in front of their dressing tables. Claire descends the minute winding staircase from the special cubbyhole where she has gone to get ready. Helped by two apprentices, who are literally engulfed in her train, she miraculously manages to cleave a way for herself through the crowded passage.

She enters the grand salon. The apprentices hand over the train to the maid of honor. The veil, which only a moment ago was a mere piece of chiffon, is now an ethereal cloud of white about her head. The announcer shouts:

"Grand Mariage."

It is a signal. Silence has fallen in the dressing room as Claire sets off on her snow-white voyage. From the humblest little seamstress to Mme Raymonde and myself, we all wait in anguish to see how she will be received. The applause which she gets is not just for her dress but for the whole collection.

Has the wedding dress already been shown? I can hardly believe it. Claire has scarcely left us before the whole world seems to be on its feet. Chairs are pushed back, and there is the sound of tumultuous applause. In a chaos of abandoned chairs and spilled ash trays, the audience splits up into little groups, some of whom nod their heads in agreement, while others dispute some particular point arising from the collection. The large family of "haute couture" is reunited.

Everyone makes for the grand salon where compliments, arguments, criticism and gossip are all being freely exchanged. Meanwhile waiters are mounting the staircase, bearing the champagne with which we all now drink a toast to the new fashion.

For me, the terrible moment has arrived when I have to face the voices, laughter, cheers and sighs, of which up till

now I have heard only the echoes behind my gray satin curtains. I abandon my vantage point and relinquishing my momentary deafness, surrender myself up to the warmth and affection of my friends. I call it a terrible moment, because it is now that I reach the climax of the terror I have been experiencing ever since the beginning of the show. But it is also a delicious moment, because I now see for the first time the beloved faces of my friends, whose presence up till now I have only suspected. While the champagne goes around, I shake outstretched hands, kiss scented cheeks, receive the congratulations of my staff, and listen to the delightfully exaggerated words of praise which are being applied to my collection:

"Divine!" "Adorable!" "Ravishing!"

My first name is on every lip; I want to thank every single person in the room, and tell him or her how happy I am to have given satisfaction. Intoxicated with noise and joy, I scarcely have time to reply to the journalist who asks me which is my favorite dress.

"They are all my favorites," I answer. "They are my children, and I love them all equally well. . . ."

The fact that I see these people twice a year, and always under such moving circumstances, creates bonds of affection closer than those of blood. I have no idea if other dressmaking houses have the same kissing ritual after the show is over; but being by nature a person who adores demonstrations of affection and tenderness, I know that I kiss many cheeks that day. And my own cheeks are covered with lipstick, a sure sign of the success of my collection, apart from the fact that red is my lucky color.

Changed and relaxed, the mannequins now make their way into the salon. I see them in their corner, sipping their champagne, still trembling slightly from the tension of the show,

smiling with a mixture of nervousness and satisfaction. In a moment I shall go into the dressing room with them and toast our success, together with the *premières*. As my own nerves relax, I feel exhaustion creeping over me. It is almost delicious to feel so tired. I reply through a haze to the hail of questions that are being flung at me. One thought obsesses me: to sit down and taste at last the joy of having completed the collection.

I want to shout out: "It's done, it's finished, it's over at last!"

At the same time I realize that tomorrow I shall feel an intolerable void. My life revolves around the preparation of a collection with all its torments and joy. In the respite which will be mine after tomorrow, I shall experience this no more. I know that in spite of all the delights of a holiday, it will seem hollow. As the salons gradually empty, my thoughts stray to the dresses which so recently filled them. Who knows what tomorrow holds in store for them? They are back hanging in their wardrobes, as forgotten as the empty champagne glasses. Now is the moment when I should like to sit down in front of them, gaze at them for the last time and thank them from the bottom of my heart.

THE ROMANCE OF CLOTHES

It is only after the collection has been completed and shown that its life really begins in earnest. Those whose task it is to guide a dress on its first steps along the path toward commercial success will think of me as a very unnatural father, because once the opening of the collection is over, I lose interest in my children and practically never see them again.

For they now cease to be my children and become objects of commercial value. The very evening of the day when they are shown to the press, they are paraded in front of the professional buyers.

The first to come are the representatives of the big American stores, escorted by a representative of their Paris branch. They are as interested in precedence as were the fashion writers. They have also paid a high price for their seats, or, to be more precise, they have paid a large deposit, as a safeguard against the possibility that they will not buy anything at the show. Mm   Luling and Mme Minassian have to give as much attention to the seating arrangements as the publicity department did in the morning. New York and Chicago pair off. San Francisco is enthroned on a sofa. Boston faces the window and shares a whole row of armchairs with Montreal. Each one has to be given the feeling that he or she, alone, is our most valued client. And alas, once again five people must be squeezed in where only two were expected. The little salon, which the journalists scorned in the morning, now becomes the most prized situation because fewer people can get

in there and it is therefore less strictly supervised. To please our customers, we should have to litter the rooms with screens so that they could watch the show without our witnessing their reactions.

The relative position of the various buyers in the salon depends above all on the importance of their respective shops, but also to a certain extent on the volume of business they do with us. Mme Minassian will tell you with a smile that she has given a particular client a less good seat than that assigned to him at the last collection.

"I am punishing him, because he did not buy so much at the last showing."

The first visitors arrive at about three. They all know one another and we all know them. With the years, we have become a kind of little family. But these are hardened professionals and there is no time for idle chitchat. Everyone keeps a poker face, emotions well under control. Nobody wants to demonstrate a liking for a particular model; on the contrary, buyers do their best not to betray their preference to their vigilant colleagues. This makes the seating all important—and Mme Luling has given herself a migraine in her anxiety not to offend or favor anyone unduly.

The mannequins, who were received with rapture in the morning, now find themselves greeted with deliberate indifference, a perfect illustration of the rapid change of atmosphere which makes up the life of a garment. No longer an object of admiration for connoisseurs, the dress has become a possible weapon in a competitive world. The girls, still elated with their recent glory, are always a little put out by this reception. They still do their utmost to elicit applause, although the only models that stand a chance of receiving it are the ball gowns. These win the outward marks of approval deliberately

held back from the day dresses, just because they are rarely ordered by the big stores.

Although I cannot hope to arouse delirious enthusiasm in this assembly of hardheaded experts (the scattered applause is never directed at the models finally chosen by the applauders), I do look for a certain quality of silence. The deeper and longer it is, the surer I am that the model has been a success. The buyers are preoccupied with the smallest details of the collection. The most honorable buyers, who would be affronted by the suggestion that they may copy a model they have not bought, seek—quite naturally—to augment their actual buys with detailed recollections of the other dresses they have not ordered. This is the cause of the rigidity of their attitude, a mixture of concentration and determination to give nothing away.

When Claire returns to the dressing room, conversation breaks out in the salon. No one can help commenting on the display and many buyers are eager to get hold of their particular saleswoman, in order to place a definite order. Certain of them are conscientious enough to see the collection twice; others have no choice but to place an order that very evening. The most hurried are those who, like my good friend Alvin Walker from Montreal, are leaving for their own country by airplane the next day.

Poor dresses! What a fate is theirs from now on! As the right to buy includes that of examining the dress thoroughly, for hours the models are now probed minutely, measured, turned inside out, unstitched, sometimes literally pulled to pieces, in order to get them to yield their secrets. We are lucky if buttons and embroideries are not torn off as samples or souvenirs. During the slaughter, I prefer not to enter the salons, to spare myself a spectacle which would hurt me almost as much as it hurts the dresses.

The publicity department is demanding the dresses for photographs; Mme Minassian wants them for an impatient client. A saleswoman is asking for a particular dress; meanwhile a workroom is calling for the same dress, to fit a customer. Of course they all want the same dress at the same moment, and all of them say it will only be for "two minutes."

When it is all over, which is often very late, Mme Luling, eternally gay and good-humored and apparently never tired, actually has the strength to go out on the town with cousins in the fashion world, come from the four corners of the globe, who are delighted, after their working day, to rediscover "gay Preee."

The next day it is the turn of the manufacturers. Many of the representatives of the big stores come twice so the confusion is, if possible, even greater than it was on the previous day. Behind each door, each screen, on every step, are sitting two people deep in animated talk; one is selling and the other is buying. People wander and stumble through the corridors in search of a model that remains obstinately lost. The excitement continues to grow until evening. The rational passerby, who, late at night, sees the windows on the avenue Montaigne and the rue François I^{er} brilliantly lit, has no idea of the madness that has taken hold of the entire house.

Toward evening, the saleswomen are exhausted and the clients are at the end of their endurance. If the session goes on much longer, we provide a picnic for them. Already there have been champagne and whisky to revive flagging spirits. The whirligig continues. Each buyer has his own personal preference; he likes a particular salon, a particular mannequin; he also has his tiresome eccentricities and little jokes. Mme Luling manages to be everywhere at once in this chaos. She can put a name to every face and greet even the most forbidding expression with a smile. She looks sublimely nonchalant

but she is careful to see that no one lifts a jewel off a model in a corner or takes advantage of a dark nook to dismantle a whole dress.

Buying is a difficult art. The buyer has to know how to reconcile the needs of his clients with the desire for novelty, and choose the exact models which his particular clientele will want from the 170 before him. His choice is made at the cost of a great deal of conflict and indecision. In the early hours of the morning, dead with exhaustion, the saleswoman goes to bed, convinced that all her clients are at one and the same time in a fearful hurry and absolutely incapable of making up their minds. The next morning, fortified by sleep, she finds that, after all, they are perfectly charming.

Now it is the turn of Europe and the rest of the world. Another row of chairs is added, the seating is arranged all over again, and the space in which the mannequins can revolve shrinks still more. This time buyers from all over the world are here to see the show. A saleswoman utters a protest on behalf of "fifty Italians," whom she wants given good seats; another complains that "her Montenegrins" have been tucked away in an insignificant corner. In the salon, conversations are being held in every conceivable European language.

I have never wished to be present at this extraordinary show, in the course of which my dresses are treated like girls in a slave market, although I am aware that the public honors me by its appreciation!

As a general rule, the models which I believe to be promising disconcert the public at first, because the eye needs to get used to them. The very person who has demanded novelty at any price becomes recalcitrant when it is presented to him. I have been regularly and successively insulted for, first, showing long dresses, then short dresses, then pigeon breasts, then flat bosoms, accentuated waistlines, and then looser waistlines.

These contradictory criticisms generally emanate from the same pens.

For the next five months after the opening, the collection is showed daily. After the foreign buyers come the Parisians themselves; then our international clientele; finally, the tourists, for whom a visit to Paris includes a glimpse of the Dior collection. The star mannequins are by now worn out and wear the dresses only during the actual show. Stand-ins are used to show the dresses to the numerous clients who want to see the models again once the show is over.

During all this time the drama—or should I say the tragedy—of imitation is being enacted in the various bars and hotels in the district around the avenue Montaigne. Despite strict laws and the supervision exercised by each house, our profession has not yet succeeded completely in keeping parasites and cheats from its doors.

There are five classical procedures by which dresses are copied, of which the most distasteful is naturally that originating with the treachery of a member of the staff. In view of the corporate nature of every collection, representing as it does the united efforts of *patron*, *premières*, workers and mannequins, all of whom have staked their future on the success of the show, this sort of betrayal is peculiarly odious and every precaution is taken against it.

When the models are carried from one part of the building to another, they are either covered with a coat or draped in white cloth so that the girls look as if they were carrying around ghosts. The sketches are carefully numbered; rejected *toiles* and models which might indicate the general trend of the collection are carefully locked up until the actual day of the opening. At the warning that a stranger is approaching, thick curtains are thrown over all the materials, hats and trimmings in the studio. In every workroom, even in the corridors,

there are numerous notices to remind the staff that "copying is stealing" and that "piracy doesn't pay." I am glad to say that I have come across very few cases of this nature and all of the few occurred in the early months after the opening of the firm.

The second type of copying takes place at a much later stage when the collection is shown to the press. In most cases, it is a question of a regrettable misuse of the details of the collection after they are released, rather than of true copying.

All French reporters have to sign a special pledge before the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture* (Fashion Designers Syndicate, when they apply for the press pass which admits them to the collections. They understand their rights and responsibilities. But some of their foreign colleagues less in the know, especially those without specific press affiliations who come on temporary press assignments, overstep in good faith the accepted limits.

Since we scatter three or four people about the salons whose sole mission it is to discover such lapses, these involuntary frauds are speedily uncovered, and the miscreants are politely asked to hand over the sketches they have made. The law of fashion design is implacable: Write all you like, but don't draw! A rarer but more serious occurrence is a deliberate attempt at copying. We unmasked one scoundrel taking microscopic photographs with a camera scarcely larger than a button. He was very quickly showed the door.

The third and probably most common copying procedure is the work of clients who have little regard for the rules of the profession. They secretly sketch some of the models which have been shown to them, under the pretext of trying to keep for reference the general style of a dress whose name they did not catch. When they are discovered, we either make them buy the disputed model or else confiscate their sketches and keep their deposit money. Into the same class fall the agree-

ments which some local or foreign buyers reach with one another. Each of them buys one model, then they all put their acquisitions together to form a miniature collection, assembled at a very small cost per head. This is more a dubious extension of their rights as buyers than an outright fraud.

So it is that the secret of the new collection, at first known only to the creator and his immediate entourage, spreads from showing to showing. If the new line is diffused too widely and too quickly, the collection becomes familiar too soon and hence may lose some of its commercial value. The influence of the press on the fashion designer is essentially different in Europe from what it is in America. In the United States the press is treated as a partner in the world of fashion. The French couturier tends to blame the press for indiscreet publicity (through too many photographs) which brings down the value of his line. But even we Frenchmen must remember that the picture of a dress in a magazine may inspire a woman to buy it, and that whatever the skill and accuracy of a drawing or photograph, nothing can compare with the model itself. Just as, without the *toile*, no seamstress can produce the "real thing," a well-dressed woman will not be content with an approximation made from a photograph.

The forms of fraud which I have just enumerated belong in the category of venial offenses, but the two I shall now describe are systematic robbery, which is a serious threat to the future of dress design.

The "model renters" had their heyday in the years just after the war, and it was not until 1948 that their ringleader, a particularly cunning woman, was detected. She was buying through several intermediaries—generally private clients—the best models from the great Parisian fashion houses. On her return to New York, she organized miniature shows of her own. These semiofficial showings took place in the leading

New York hotels and admission was by invitation only. Every guest had to pay, for his entrance, somewhere between 350 and 500 dollars. For this price he had the right to take away any model he chose and return it three days later, after having made a copy. If he wanted to hire a larger number of dresses, he paid proportionately more; people even had to book certain specially popular dresses in order to have their turn at copying them.

In 1948, a preliminary warning cost the aforementioned "model renter" several million francs in damages to the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture*. Nevertheless she persisted in her trade, which was perfectly legal by American law. She made an arrangement with several manufacturers, who bought models for the stipulated price and passed them on to her New York collection. For three seasons French dressmakers tried to protect themselves by putting an identifying number under the lining of each dress. Every buyer who comes to the Paris openings signs a formal agreement not to hand over any model for the benefit of another member of the trade. So once we discovered the guilty people at our end of the chain, we could unmask the organization. A delegate of the Syndicate was sent to each of her shows at the New York hotels. Passing himself off as a client, he rented several dresses, unstitched a special corner of the lining, and wired the secret numbers to Paris. Thus, little by little, all the manufacturers employed by the "model renter" were discovered. It was also found that several of the models had reached New York via Rome, where the buyer, doubly attentive to his own interests, copied them overnight before sending them to New York by air.

In the course of this fight against fraud, we adopted the big laundries' method of marking dresses. It is based upon the use of an indelible ink, invisible to the naked eye, and showing

only when the material is put under ultraviolet rays. No dress now leaves my house without this distinctive mark.

The "model renter" was followed by the publisher of albums of sketches. The success of this form of fraud—the most widespread which has ever been practiced—is partly explained by the difference in legislation between France and the United States, the laws of the latter country being less strict as regards artistic and commercial property.

Immediately after the opening of the major French collections, even before the dresses have been delivered to our regular clients, a large number of the publisher's subscribers received at their homes, against a payment of a few hundred dollars, an album of sketches containing the models of each leading house. If the buyer wanted more albums, he paid proportionately more. Without leaving his front door, he now had at his disposal a mass of documentation on the Paris collections. In return, the publisher had the effrontery to demand his silence, under threat of prosecution!

In August, 1955, alone, more than 1,000 subscribers procured about 300 models from the collections of the principal French designers by this means: 142 of my own models figured in the album, of which 57 were exact copies. The publisher made more money than that yielded by all the designs exported from Paris put together. Half legally, half clandestinely, he recruited buyers by word of mouth, and even extended his services to certain other countries in Europe, such as Switzerland, Germany and Belgium. This miscreant was at last unmasked and is now being sued by a number of couturiers. What will become of him? The question is of real importance for the future of dress design.

Who furnishes the editor of these albums with their information? I am afraid their informants are trusted guests whom

we receive during the very first days of the collection, perhaps even at the opening itself, since the sketches appear, at the latest, four days after the opening. By comparing notes, it is possible for the various houses to find out whose visits tend to coincide with pirating, but so far we have not been able to transform our suspicions into certainties.

The forgers must be exceptionally gifted. I have stated that 57 out of 142 of the models of my winter collection were reproduced exactly, although the copyists must rely chiefly upon memory. It would be impossible for them to sketch the essentials of a new line unnoticed by their neighbors and the supervisors posted in the salon. Of course the program given to all the guests jogs their memories. But quite apart from this, the accuracy of the pirated sketches testifies to exceptional powers of observation.

Aside from the grave financial losses caused by such practices, it is disagreeable to think that you have opened your doors, and perhaps your arms, twice a year, to one or more persons who have come to see your collection with the avowed intention of robbing you.

Not having the mind of a Sherlock Holmes or a Maigret, I have not sought to penetrate this distasteful mystery any further. In fact I have taken little part in the events which I have just described. Once the two opening shows are over, I turn to other matters. I meet with certain buyers and journalists who during the years have become close friends as well as business associates. I also gather together my employees in order to thank them: the *premières*, their assistants, the mannequins, the studio personnel—all those who have helped me to make the collection and who are as exhausted as I am at this time. Together we spend a few calm and peaceful moments, away from the usual hullabaloo of the house.

After that I do not linger long in Paris. At the end of six

weeks of uninterrupted work, I have only one idea: to go back to the peace of my house at Montauroux. To me peace and quiet are a necessity of life. If I am in one sense a very busy man, in another sense I am a very lazy one. The application and care which I devote to my work are rooted in my desire to be finished with it as soon as possible. Fortunately I am innately conscientious: I never stop until I am altogether satisfied with what I have done.

Three or four days after the opening of the season, I am off. It is not until I am actually in the train or the car that I feel really free. But the moment that I get to Montauroux, I feel the need of renewing contact with the avenue Montaigne. Every evening the telephone gives me news of what has happened during the day. I am told how the foreign buyers have reacted, what our best clients have ordered, and the principal clippings from the press are read aloud. In addition the graph of the sales is described to me. It begins to take shape from the very first week: the third day faintly, the fifth with more assurance, and by the tenth with a clearly defined pattern. It is rare that this initial indication is not confirmed in the weeks that follow.

As the days slip by, these telephone calls, which at first I await so passionately, begin to drop off; finally they cease altogether. Henceforth, from my point of view, the collection is definitely finished.

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PART III

INSIDE

A FASHION

ESTABLISHMENT

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MANNEQUINS

THE DRESSING ROOM, or *cabine*, of the mannequins is a world of its own. Like the dressing rooms in a theater, it has its arm-chairs, lamps, and mirrors, and something of the same tawdry quality.

The mannequins, or *jeunes filles*, are obsessed by one idea: to look beautiful. Of course, they all are beautiful yet they are always a little unsure of their own charms. Once they have finished making up, they turn to Mme de Turkheim and ask her anxiously:

"Do I look pretty, *baronne*?"

If she fails to reassure them, they are thoroughly down-cast—at least for the next five minutes, the time it takes them to correct their appearance in front of the mirror! Nowhere else is such a pure cult of beauty to be found. The actress in her dressing room thinks of her role as much as of her face. The mannequin, on the other hand, concentrates entirely on looking beautiful.

Chronically unpunctual, the mannequin bursts into the dressing room exclaiming anxiously: "I'm not late, am I?"

But if she is unpunctual, she is also very fast. In the twinkling of an eye she has undressed, donned a white smock, and seated herself in front of her dressing table. The dressing tables are aligned like a row of desks in a schoolroom. The dressing room itself often reminds me of a class where the pupils are studying to take a degree in beauty. In every desk is hidden a pile of candy, knitting, mascots, photographs and

love letters. Each one of the mannequins has her own dressing table to which she is passionately attached. Renée, for example, would not surrender her place facing the door for anything in the world. One night she dreamed that her place had been changed, woke up in floods of tears and arrived especially early the next morning in order to reassure herself. All the mannequins are like Renée: creatures of set habits, moving in a world of hard work which engulfs them and compels them to spend several hours every day at their mirror.

Mme de Turckheim, "Tutu" to me and my staff, is always "the Baroness" to her girls. She calls them "my girls" whereas to the rest of us they are "the young girls." The business office and the workrooms call them more formally "the mannequins."

Their little world bears no resemblance to the lurid pictures which have likened it to the Edwardian chorus girls' dressing rooms. Gentlemen in opera cloaks do not wait at the door of couture houses to take the mannequins' arms and guide them into golden carriages which will carry them to equally golden adventures. Today, it is the girls' husbands—if anybody—who wait for them, grumbling slightly because they are late. Most of them leave alone, in a hurry, and leap into a taxi or down the subway in order to get home as fast as possible. The lucky ones own a good middle-class car, like a Simca.

There is always a tendency in the public mind to invest the careers of these girls with a glamour that no longer corresponds to reality. They lead the sort of life which suits them, and they make the marriages they want. The husband they are looking for is not necessarily Prince Charming or a millionaire banker, but a man whom they like, to whom they will be a loving wife and a good housekeeper and to their children an excellent mother. To lead this exemplary life twenty-one hours a day, they consent to the life of a butterfly for the three

remaining hours. Ordinarily the mannequins spend from three to eight years in a fashion house, coping with the exhausting life of showings and photographs, and then they disappear.

Before speaking of the girls who are at present working for me, I should like to describe three of my former star mannequins, whose lives have since developed in a different direction—Tania, France and Sylvie. I have for these as for all of them a special fondness, like that of Pygmalion for Galatea. They alone can bring my clothes to life. Even in the act of creation I have had these girls in mind. It is not until they put on the model that I see the dress in its full glory. It is true that I am demanding; but who is not demanding in pursuit of his dreams.

One of the most naturally gifted of my mannequins was Tania. I first met her when she came to Lucien Lelong, at the age of sixteen. In a few days she had acquired all the tricks of the trade. From her very first rehearsal she developed an entirely personal manner of showing clothes.

Tania shares with Praline, another mannequin I knew at Lelong, the quality of being a mannequin turned into a woman, rather than a woman turned mannequin. You have probably guessed that she is a Slav, and that is as characteristic of her as the fact that she is a mannequin. Her charm, her slightly less charming tempers, her contradictions, her extravagances are all Slav—but they have not stopped her from leading the sort of life she wants. She has opened her own fashion house in Italy, and, true to her temperament, has already lived through a thousand disasters and a thousand triumphs. Tania is femininity itself, with her ruses, her fibs, her little scenes, and also her grace, her sweetness and her loyalties. If there are "prima donnas" in dressmaking as well as in the theater, Tania will certainly be known as one of them.

The tallest mannequin I ever had is France. By her height, her slimness and her blond coloring she truly embodied my ideas and feelings, looking particularly wonderful in seductive dresses. When I took my collections abroad, I loved to clothe her in numbers called "France" and "Paris," which were always sensationally applauded with cries of: "How beautiful!"

She is so typically French, Parisian French, that I always think that in admiring her beauty, people are also admiring my country. For all her apparent guilelessness, she has achieved the sort of life she wanted. She now lives, happily married to a wealthy husband, beneath the easy, voluptuous skies of the tropics.

Sylvie, whom I also took on when she was scarcely more than a child, remained the incarnation of the young girl throughout the whole of her career as a mannequin. She wore the simple, unadorned, gay little models which young girls love. Her brunette charm and her tiny waist suited these dresses to perfection. On the day of her marriage, however, she abandoned modeling forever, as if married happiness prevented her from enacting the role of a young girl. What more charming example could there be of professional devotion and integrity?

How can I best introduce you into the dressing room? Let us say that it is five o'clock and the collection has just been shown. For still another hour, the mannequins must be on call for clients who may wish to see a particular dress again. So here they all are, waiting.

Odile, slight, fragile, and made still more distant and unapproachable by her extreme nearsightedness, is sitting at her dressing table; she is thinking up complicated menus for her husband, who adores food. Catherine, even more slender than Odile, if that is possible, is carefully cutting a cake to be shared with the other girls.

"If you're a good girl, I'll give you the recipe!"

Lia, imperturbably Rumanian even in Paris, is telling a long story about how she has at last found an apartment and has burned her first home-cooked roast. Victoire chooses just this moment to enter with a chestnut cake on which she desires the others' opinion. Suggestions are many and varied.

"If I were you, I'd add a little vanilla."

"And lots of cream!"

It's teatime, and all the girls are as greedy as kittens. One more legend down the drain! The dressing room of a fashion house is the negation of all diets ever invented. The truth is that several hours a day of a mannequin's rapid pacing is worth all the exercise in the world and is in itself enough to maintain a perfect figure.

Food is not the only subject of conversation in the dressing room. Knitting, painting, philosophy, housework, films and the theater are all discussed in turn. But the fact that my girls are not sirens does not mean that they are a lot of shrinking violets. They are far from being prudish, and some of their racier stories reach even my studio!

If one of the mannequins is getting married or expects a baby, the dressing room is transformed into a workshop. Layette or trousseau, everyone wants to participate in a family event, since a fashion house is essentially one big family. Scarcely a collection passes without one or other of these happy events taking place, and I am obliged to grant a leave of absence to a future mother, who is abandoning the "A" line or the "H" line for the "Baby" line.

After spending part of the day overdressed and overdecorated, the girls are only too happy to slip a trench coat or fur jacket over a simple jersey blouse and skirt when they go home. It gives them a rest from the splendor and luxury in which they have to face the lights. The story of the Cinderella who bor-

rows a dress from the collection to go, incognito, to a ball, is another bit of fiction. The mannequins can eventually acquire for a very small sum some of the dresses they have showed, but they are never allowed to borrow one from the current showing.

One by one, I have destroyed the myths which surround the mannequin's profession. Is all romance, then, dead? On the contrary, I believe that every age has its own brand of romance, different but equally entrancing. These girls whom the press has christened the "Ambassadors of Fashion" are not one whit less glamorous than their predecessors.

I am often told that my team of mannequins is run on rather different lines from those of the other houses; this is probably true. Since I am convinced that the good mannequin is born, not made, I personally interview every candidate for the job. It is true that there are specialized schools where girls can learn to walk, stand, and behave. But the art of being a mannequin—like every other art—can be subject to no fixed rules. One may generalize to the extent of saying that a mannequin ought to be tall and thin but such impersonal standards have little value. A mannequin has to *be*—that is, to have a personality of her own; and that personality must harmonize with the creative ideas of the designer.

Nevertheless, every establishment should employ a variety of types of girls, to match the varied types of clients. This means there should be tall, medium and small mannequins, dark or blond, very young, and not so young. But in spite of these differences, the girls should share a common style, a sort of family likeness, characteristic of the house in which they work.

In order to become a mannequin, a girl has first of all to be able to walk, which is not easy. Many actresses, and even danc-

ers, have come to see me, and to their great astonishment have been rejected. A natural, elegant walk and good carriage add up to that word which has rather gone out of fashion: *bearing*. Like successful dresses, born mannequins are smart without effort. On them clothes spring to life and create their maximum effect. Above all, this effect is not achieved by artificial airs and graces, or by a sort of brazen chic designed to attract attention. Contemporary elegance is at once simple and natural.

Of all my mannequins of today, Renée is probably the one who comes closest to my ideal. Every dress she puts on appears to be a success, so exactly do her proportions resemble those of my imagination. She seems to be reincarnated so perfectly in the model she wears that one sees not her face but the living creation. Distant and aloof, with her whole life centered in the folds of the fabric, she personifies reserve and good taste.

Priestess-like and mysterious, a mannequin must succeed in gripping her audience. The theatrical expression "to have presence," often misused, is exactly suitable here. It was for this "presence" that I engaged Alla. She came one day with a friend to apply for a job as a stand-in. As soon as I saw her, I begged Mme de Turckheim to take her on. It seems daringly paradoxical to show clothes designed for Western women on such a markedly Asiatic beauty. But Alla, for all the mysterious allure of the East in her features, is in fact half-Russian. Her body is completely European, and the woman who chooses one of the dresses she has modeled will never be disappointed. Alla is one of the born mannequins I have described. She was hired one day and ready to show the collection the next. She showed clothes with an aloof and impassive air without suppressing her Slavic spontaneity. Alla also

speaks many languages without an accent, as if her cradle had been placed simultaneously in many different corners of the world.

I have never heard such a storm of criticism directed at a mannequin as that which greeted the arrival of Victoire. She came into my office practically on the eve of a showing. None of my staff thought she had the least chance of being hired. She was too small and, above all, she did not know how to walk, they said. It was quite true. But in spite of her dissimilarity to the other girls, I decided to engage her. She had a sort of Saint-Germain-des Prés or student-quarter look that pleased me. I promised to make one or two dresses for her, and then, as the fittings went on, I realized that she was becoming one of my stars.

But I had jumped too far ahead of the taste of my public. At the sight of this newcomer, the press and my clients combined to raise a chorus of protest.

"How dare you show a mannequin of this kind? What manners! What a type! She hasn't even got a good figure!"

Some of my critics even went so far as to claim that her presence in the show constituted an insult to my clientele. In fact, I was under fire from all sides. But as I knew perfectly well that Victoire was delightful and had the feeling for her work, I stuck to my guns. While everyone was begging me to get rid of her, I decided to let her show a second collection. Suddenly, she was all the rage! Eyes were opened to her attractions. Her only crimes had been that she epitomized the youth of her time, and that she was not very tall. People said that I had mysteriously transformed her, but in fact it was they who had changed, not she. All at once the angular charm of Victoire was apparent to them; henceforth she could do no wrong. Victoire became a star—and justified the triumphant name which I had given her.

Lucky, equally celebrated, is such a good mannequin that she did not choose her profession because she was pretty but made herself pretty in order to fit herself for her profession. She comes from Brittany and has the high cheekbones and slanting eyes which her compatriots, by some curious twist of fate, seem to have inherited from Mongolia. Every entrance is for her a matter of intense concentration; studying and interpreting the slightest nuance of a dress, she does not merely wear it, she positively acts it.

I wish I could describe all the mannequins under my roof. Together with the *premières*, they are my most important assistants. Their role may seem a passive one until you remember that the most beautiful dress in the world can fail utterly and irredeemably if it is worn by a bad mannequin. Their once lowly profession has now become so popular that parents encourage their daughters to go in for it, like the theater; the parents even come to me themselves and beg me to engage their daughters. For every ravishing girl whom I interview, I have to see twenty who are obviously ill-suited to such a career. All parents seem to be blind when it is a question of judging the beauty of their offspring.

The month preceding each of the two yearly collections is an endurance test for the girls. From ten in the morning until eight at night, or sometimes as late as midnight, they are on their feet. They scarcely have time to snatch a hasty lunch. I am always amazed by the stamina these frail girls show. Nothing seems to break down their endurance.

As Renée once said: "The only thing which would stop us would be if we actually fainted away. But I don't believe that will ever happen to me!"

Stoically, they endure everything and must surely be at the end of their strength by the eve of the battle. The *premières* are so wrapped up in putting the finishing touches on their

dresses, they completely forget they are working on human beings, not dummies. I often have to bring them back to reality, when I see a mannequin reeling with exhaustion.

"Hurry up! Let her go!"

The girl gives me a grateful glance, but says nothing. Just as the *première* is absorbed by the need to make her dress perfect, the mannequin is thinking of whether she will be beautiful and fresh for the morrow. She trembles with impatience when a last-minute hitch with the trimming threatens to prolong the session. The lounge, which is near the studio, becomes a sort of dormitory where, on deck chairs, even on the floor, the mannequins sleep, eat, smoke or gossip as they await the final fitting.

But the next morning, when Mme de Turckheim, entering the *cabine*, asks the ritual question: "Everything all right, girls?"—they are ready. All traces of the fatigue of the evening before have been miraculously effaced, as if by some magic formula. With only a few hours sleep, they have gained fresh energy and are as beautiful as goddesses. Even more seriously than usual, they work over their makeup. It is sort of selfless concentration; they are making themselves beautiful for the sake of the dresses.

The *premières* interrupt once more, with last-minute admonitions for the care of the beloved dress:

"Don't sit down, you'll wrinkle it!"

"Don't make another move, or you'll ruin your drape."

To listen to them, you would think the dresses were objects to be contemplated, never to move or live. The *premières* talk about "my dress" the way the medieval craftsmen talked of "my masterpiece." They are not dressing a girl; they are simply allowing a body to be put inside *their* dress.

Each dresser, for her part, is equally zealous in defense of her own two mannequins. Only *their* clothes look wonderful,

only *they* deserve to wear them. The dressers are fierce watchdogs, and even commit robbery on behalf of their girls. If an earring, a pin or a ribbon disappears from a charge's box they are quite ready to steal a replacement from her neighbor.

Once preparations for the opening are complete, the mannequin's period of really hard work is of about two weeks' duration. The morning is devoted to photographs for the house itself or for the magazines; in the afternoon there is the show; in the evening the girls, worn out, are replaced by the stand-ins who show individual models to the buyers. After these hectic two weeks, the mannequin only has to clock in at three o'clock in the afternoon to show the collection to the clients. This schedule lasts until the following collection with time off in June and at the winter-sports season.

Once or twice a year, my collection takes to the air. Mannequins are often called, as I have said, "Ambassadors of Fashion"—and their profession certainly takes them to the four corners of the globe. My girls have been to Japan, South Africa, Greece, England, Scotland, Austria, Italy, Sweden, Finland and South America. As a rule the little group showing in a foreign country consists of eight mannequins and four dressers accompanied by either M. de Maussabré or M. Donati of the publicity department.

With the exception of Renée, who hates leaving Paris and will never go anywhere by plane (how I sympathize with her!), all the girls love going away. But of course these trips are not leisurely vacations at all. Showing a collection entails so much preparation and hard work that the girls are generally more anxious to go to sleep than to go dancing. Another legend must be debunked—that of night clubs, parties and the rich admirers with whom a mannequin is supposedly surrounded. They have to be positively forced to go out, cajoled into attending a dinner. To Mme de Turckheim's despair, once the

showing is over they have only one wish—to do nothing but rest.

The one constant passion they all share is their solicitude for their own particular dresses. This is amply illustrated when a dress has to be entrusted to a stand-in, because of some change in the timetable. The "owner" always indignantly complains that it will be ruined, and the corselet will be stretched! Oh, this corselet, what heartaches it causes! All the girls tighten it as far as they possibly can, and in order to avoid ugly incidents, Mme de Turckheim has to make sure that she gets stand-ins at least as thin as the regular girls.

Of course the girls have their caprices and fancies. I know that within the house, I am often accused of being too indulgent toward them: I hear murmurs of "Monsieur Dior and his precious mannequins!"

The business office thinks I employ too many, or that I pay them too much; the *premières* say I give in to their slightest whim; the salespeople sometimes exclaim that they are impossible. I keep very quiet. My mannequins are what gives life to my dresses, and above all I want my dresses to be happy.



© Maywald

The Boutique Christian Bérard designed for me



© Maywald

*Corner of the
mannequins
dressing room*



© Mike de Dulmen

*"H" line (autumn-
winter 1954-55)*



© Maywald

*"A" line (spring-
summer 1955)*



© Maywald

*"Aimant" line
(autumn-winter
1956)*

THE CLIENTS

I HAVE already described the dresses, the way they are made, the mannequins who show them and the professional buyers who order them. Now it is time to describe the last comers in this long procession: the women who will finally wear them.

The first private customers come in and see the collection as the last professional buyers are leaving. The two groups may even overlap a little. Mme Luling, the sales manager, waits good-humoredly for those whom she terms, with a mixture of amusement and affection, her "darlings." How can I best describe our clients? I said earlier that it has always been my ambition to be classed as a good craftsman. The first and most elementary duty of a designer, as of any businessman, is to give the customers what they want. Their demands are limitless, and we ruin ourselves trying to satisfy them, but we must not forget that they have every right to make them, even to overstep the limits of our forbearance. With that in mind, let us watch the clients arrive.

When they come, the salon takes on quite a different air. Always full, overfull (25,000 people see the collection every season), it ceases to be a workshop and becomes a place of entertainment. As worldly and frivolous as any other feminine gathering, this one is composed of an audience which looks while it does not listen. Conversation centers around vacations, the new plays, other showings and the latest piece of gossip . . . while eyes are fixed on the collection.

Scarcely has Claire disappeared in her wedding gown than

the rows of chairs come to life with a loud buzz of conversation. The saleswomen hasten to confer with their particular customers.

"Would Madame like to decide right away?"

No, she would prefer to come back a few days later and choose her clothes in the calmer atmosphere of the fitting room. She may not be in a hurry—but fifty others are. A miracle has to take place to satisfy them all—the miracle of the multiplication of the dresses. The successful models should really be reproduced on the spot, like Japanese paper flowers in a glass of water. All are demanded at exactly the same time, and, since there is no patience where vanity is concerned, any client who is kept waiting considers it a personal insult.

Finally the first client who managed to have the disputed dress shown to her is through with it. An army of saleswomen hovers around her, ready to snatch it, to carry it off to their own clients, who are threatening to leave "because, really, nobody seems to be in the least anxious to show me anything!"

The fitting rooms are the scene of many a tempest in a teapot, quick to flare up and quick to subside. Exclamations of enthusiasm float out from behind the gray curtains:

"How well it suits you! It's so absolutely right."

"Goodness, how tanned you are!"

Of course every woman is determined to squeeze into the dress of her choice, even though the mannequin who wears it is an entirely different type, and the saleswomen have to perform miracles of diplomacy in order to dissuade them.

"Lia wears it in the show . . . she's appallingly skinny this season."

Poor Lia, who was never in better shape!

These minor irritations, these disputes—even battles—over the models, all this endless fuss proves one thing to me: they

are in demand and therefore they are a success. Nothing in the world gives me more pleasure.

Mme Luling's eyes are everywhere. Hastily she snuffs out her cigarette in order to nip a tragedy in the bud. Four times in the course of her journey to the scene of action she forgets what she set out for, as four other crises waylay her. Once she arrives in a fitting room, peace is instantly restored. The client whose evening sheath has just been found gazes happily into the mirror. But meanwhile Mme Luling, always with a pleasant smile on her lips, has already darted off somewhere else. She knows all her real clients by name and has an unerring, unrivaled eye for detecting fakes.

She can tell you, after one glance around the big *salon*: "The woman in the sixth chair from the mantelpiece, in the third row, has brought her own little dressmaker with her again. That's the third time she's done it. Really, it's too much. I shall have to speak to her about it."

At the end of the show, as the *salon* empties, Mme Luling knows better than anyone how to cope with those so-called friends who have come to see the show without any intention of buying, but who nevertheless think it necessary to say to her as they proceed down the stairs: "Your dresses are really delightful."

She can also deal charmingly with those who say openly in front of her: "It's obvious that only his evening dresses are any good this season."

The opening of a collection has become a social event at which it is smart to be present; it is a meeting place for friends who have secrets to confide to one another. It is also a source of entertainment, if we are to judge by the telephone calls asking the publicity department to "reserve a table for the show this evening."

But I have made up my mind to keep on offering my shows to those who come simply to feast their eyes; and I have given instructions to my saleswomen never to harass those visitors, nicknamed "swallows," who have obviously come with no intention of ordering.

When I opened my house, I told M. Boussac that I wanted to dress only the most fashionable women, from the finest ranks of society. I have watched the clientele I desired being built up, little by little, by the most natural means. These were the women for whom I was working; and these are the women who answered my appeal. Luckily I did not have to make it too pressing.

It is my invariable rule not to enter my salons, never to intervene directly in the running of the business, and to see my clients but rarely. Even the most intimate friend who comes to 30, avenue Montaigne finds the Maison Christian Dior and not Christian Dior himself. It is far better this way. My friends are free to buy or not as they please, without a feeling of embarrassment.

In the same way, it is always best not to intervene with a client who may wish to be unfaithful to us.

"When they hesitate, I always advise them to buy elsewhere," says Mme Luling, who reigns in the salons. "Remorse is better than regret."

The unfaithful one will probably return several weeks later, enchanted by a suit she has bought from one of my colleagues, and only too happy to choose a cocktail dress from us. Or she may have been disappointed elsewhere, in which case she upbraids her saleswoman.

"It's all your fault! You should never have let me go anywhere else."

With perfect good humor and a tinge of irony, Mme Linzeler, who supervises the fittings, says: "The best bargain

in the world is a successful dress. It brings happiness to the woman who wears it, and it is never too dear for the man who pays for it. The most expensive dress in the world is a dress which is a failure. It infuriates the woman who wears it and it is a burden to the man who pays for it. In addition, it practically always involves him in the purchase of a second dress much more expensive—the only thing that can blot out the memory of the first failure.”

On the whole our clients are very faithful to us, although sometimes they try to make us believe that they are not, in order to obtain faster delivery or a better price.

There are some delightful cases of feminine logic pushed to excess, which are always rather touching. For example, the charming lady who had a whole collection of black suits shown to her wiped away a furtive tear, and finally murmured, as she made her choice:

“It’s such a pity that mourning is so *common* at funerals!”

Another woman watched the show morosely. Nothing seemed to please her. When it was over she conferred with her saleswoman in a low voice and finally, with a sorrowful glance at Mme Luling, announced:

“This year, as my husband is bankrupt, I shall order only ten dresses.”

The story of the “telephone” still makes everyone in the building laugh although it happened some years back; the saleswomen love to recall it. It happened over a new, but by no means young, client, who had chosen several dresses and was coming for her first fitting. She was a foreigner, in Paris for a short stay, and was living in a borrowed apartment. Mme Luling asked the saleswoman to remind the client discreetly of the indispensable little formality of the payment. The girl came back a few minutes later, seemingly overcome with emotion.

"Madame," she gasped. "Now is not the moment to talk to her about payments! There's been a disaster! She's just had her telephone disconnected."

With these dreadful words, she rushed away. In one awful moment of revelation, Mme Luling imagined all the dresses under way, the work already finished, the unpaid bill and the wrath of the management! What could one possibly expect from a woman who couldn't even pay her telephone bill? Cursing the "darling" who had recommended this undesirable client, she also cursed herself for her carelessness in not finding out more about her. Resolutely, she made for the fitting room, where she found consternation reigning. The saleswoman was not there, but the fitter looked as if she had been struck by lightning. As for the client, her uneasy smile bore witness to her embarrassment. After a few conventional words of politeness, Mme Luling got up her courage and launched into the fateful subject.

"We are terribly sorry to hear that you have been having trouble, Madame. . . ."

A frozen smile from the client, but no answer.

"But what are we to do with your dresses?"

The client's smile looked still more frozen.

Mme Luling was just getting ready to conjure up the forces of justice and the mysterious threats of the law, when the saleswoman rushed in followed by an electrician. The "disconnected telephone" was in fact no more than the wire of her hearing aid which a clumsy thrust of the scissors had snipped through. A quick inspection by the electrician and it was mended! With her hearing restored the client at once resumed her ease of manner, the fitter her self-assurance, and Mme Luling her presence of mind. Only the saleswoman responsible for the misunderstanding, and the client, who had

not heard a word of what Mme Luling was saying to her, were completely ignorant of what had happened.

Let me end by telling my favorite story about the disloyalty of a customer. She was unfaithful in her private life, as well as in her choice of dresses, for she had two lovers, one of whom paid her bills at Fath's, the other at Christian Dior's. The two lovers and the two couturiers were equally ignorant of the other's existence in the lady's life. One day this delightful edifice of deceit toppled to the ground. The woman entered the avenue Montaigne in a suit by Fath and on the arm of a different gentleman from the one who ordinarily accompanied her. It was only in the middle of the fitting, when she was trying on a skirt, that she realized her mistake. She hastily whipped out her diary and checked the date, the time, the name and the dress. Then she burst out, without thinking:

"Good Lord, what a fool I am! I thought it was Friday!"

I shall make no other revelations about my clients, cruel or kind. For two reasons: first of all, I detest spiteful gossip. Second, I should have to choose among my clients the favorite, and also, to satisfy certain people, the best known. The very idea of such a selection is distasteful to me. Furthermore, like a doctor, the couturier is bound by professional secrecy. As the saleswomen so well express it to me, to stress how well they know their clients:

"We see them all naked."

So let us drop the gray curtains of the fitting room and leave our clients to dress in peace.

DOMESTIC EXPANSION

IT WAS in 1946 that I moved into 30, avenue Montaigne. The delightful house was composed of a few rooms and salons that were sufficiently elegant to shelter a couture establishment with enough extra space to accommodate the eighty-five of us.

None of us could possibly imagine that the increasing need for expansion would make us first of all absorb the stables, which I mentioned earlier, then the building which was added above them, at that time number 13, rue François I^{er}, then little by little number 32, avenue Montaigne. Not only was I perfectly content within the simple confines of number 30, avenue Montaigne, but I had even feared that it might prove to be too big. Yet with three workrooms, six fitting rooms and the various divisions of the business department, it must be admitted that we were soon a little cramped. In order to keep ourselves within bounds, we had to construct, in the entrance, a little room, twelve feet square, ventilated by a small round window. I still sometimes wonder how Mme Luling managed to squeeze into it two helpers, her files, card indexes and telephones. As for the visitors who ventured in—where on earth were they put?

A little beehive, that is what my house was, when I presented my first collection. I have before me now the press release which I prepared then. It was a single sheet, reproduced by photo-offset. I had stressed two principal silhouettes: the "corolla" and the "figure 8." This combination of lengthened skirts, nipped-in waistlines and a deliberately feminine sil-

houette was instantly baptized the New Look. In the autumn, this trend was emphasized still further. The corollas curved outward and the skirts became longer still, restoring all its former mystery to the leg. On their high heels, women rediscovered a sort of dancing step, a gliding walk, which the fullness of the dresses accentuated.

The New Look brought me heavy mail. If the popularity of a star is measured by the fan mail he receives, then I ought to have been considered a celebrity indeed. Letters arrived by the thousand—mostly enthusiastic but sometimes indignant. A garage owner from Los Angeles wrote and told me that he had sworn to “tear me apart” on his next visit to Paris. According to him, it was my fault that his wife looked like a stuffed doll of the time of the Civil War. Many similar letters went with the wind. . . .

In spring 1948 came the “Zigzag” line, which gave the figure the animated look of a drawing. With winter, this tendency was confirmed by the “Winged” (or “*Ailée*”) line. The silhouette had achieved its peak of youth and nonchalance, and the gait was still easy. When I opened the year 1949 with the “*Trompe l’Oeil*” or “Optical Illusion” line, the press release had already spread to four pages, and I was explaining at length the principles on which my collection was founded.

“There are two principles on which the “*Trompe l’Oeil*” line is founded: one is through pockets and low necklines to give prominence and width to the bust, at the same time respecting the natural curve of the shoulders; the other is to leave the body its natural line but give indispensable fullness and movement to the skirts.”

From season to season, new departments enriched my little descriptions: the addition of hats, shoes, and gloves expressed the progress of the House in practical form. The “Mid-century” collection, which came the following winter, was based

on a system of cut that respected the internal geometry of the material. Straight and bias lines cut, like scissor blades, across one another, or spread out like the arms of a windmill. I have mentioned earlier the importance of the grain of the fabric; my models that season exploited it to the utmost.

Meanwhile the establishment was beginning to have traditions of its own. There was a "Christian Dior red," and in every collection the name of "Bobby" was given to the presumably most successful tailored suit. Dresses called "Paris," "New York," "London," "Plaza," "Ritz," and "Maxim's" recalled the various places to which my profession called me.

Mail continued to pour in. A Chicago nurse sent me the photograph of an evening dress reproduced in the *Chicago Tribune* with this barbed note:

"This creation of yours seems to me a nightmare staggering out of an operation room. It is heavy, deformed and inartistic. Are all your clothes the same? Have you sworn to make clowns of women?"

The dress was simple and pretty enough, and I still don't know what offended her.

The collection of spring 1950 witnessed the triumph of the "Vertical" line, which brings out the "woman" in women. Busts were narrowly molded, waists well accentuated and colors were clear as daylight. At the same time I wanted to follow up the trends of the previous collection. Thanks to numerous pleats and seams, I underlined the quality I was anxious to bring out, that quality of "work done by fairy fingers" which characterizes Parisian dressmaking. Six months later, the "Vertical" became "Oblique," joining dignity to impudence. Other themes were exploited: the "Living" line and the "Lily of the Valley." As for evening dresses, they expressed the desire for luxury, calm, happiness and beauty, which was in the air. The "Oval" succeeded the "Oblique,"

and finally I introduced the "Long" line, one of my favorite collections.

It was now autumn 1951 and in five years there had been striking changes at the avenue Montaigne. Behind the first little house, whose exquisite proportions I would not touch for an empire, there rose up a huge new eight-story building with eight workrooms, paralleled by another building, of the same height, with two workrooms on each floor. The piece-goods department, previously installed in the house in the rue François I^{er}, occupied one of these floors, then finally established itself in the covered courtyard of the newly annexed buildings.

The building at 13, rue François I^{er} was at this time occupied by the governmental Office of Economic Control. It took a great battle to win it. Getting past a few dusty file cabinets every day, we succeeded in taking over some of the rooms. But certain offices, rebelling against our insidious expansion, withstood all attack. Finally a protest strike on the part of our workers and the action of an understanding cabinet officer delivered up to us the last pockets of resistance.

So Christian Dior Perfumes were installed on the second floor, and Stockings on the third. On the fourth floor was established a studio corresponding in importance to the collection which I had to create in it. Above were three floors of workrooms, topped, on the seventh floor, by an infirmary and a social service department. As for the Boutique, which had previously occupied several square feet, it had now literally exploded!

Growing in age and size, the Maison Christian Dior was thus making its way in the world. In 1948 it had opened a house in New York, and concluded licensing agreements with England, Canada, Cuba, Australia, Chile and Mexico. It was becoming obvious that the peaceful little business that I had

at first envisaged was in the process of devouring me. The Gallup Poll gave me the unexpected honor of listing me among the five best known figures on the international scene. Fashion, what excesses do we commit in thy name!

The year 1952 was serious from the first—the year when the Iron Curtain was heavily clamped down, conflagrations were raging in Indo-China and Korea, and Arab nationalism was reviving. . . . Away with the euphoria of the New Look, and the fripperies of yesteryear. The new essential of fashion was that it should be discreet.

That is why in spring 1952 I proposed the “Sinuous” line, to indicate that fashion, for once logical, was following up the rigors of winter with a season of warm-weather agility. Eisenhower jackets and sweaters became the major theme of the collection, whose colors oscillated between beige and gray. At the same time the waist became looser. The way was paved for the “Arrow” line, the exact antithesis of the New Look.

Evening dresses, to which two seasons earlier I had given the names of musicians, now bore the names of authors. This nomenclature caused some curious conversations in the work-rooms. In the morning a client would be entranced by André Roussin, and in the afternoon she would telephone to say that, after all, she would take Jean-Paul Sartre. Paul Claudel knotted a scarf on his evening dress, while François Mauriac limited himself to a bolero.

In the dressing room a mannequin would exclaim crossly: “Look out! You’re crushing Maurice Rostand.”

In her perennial role of the bride, Claire wore Beaumarchais in memory of the *Marriage of Figaro*.

I received one letter of protest. It was from an old gentleman, indignant that the name of his grandfather had been given to “this nonsense which is supposed to be a dress.” Heaven knows what unfortunate chance had led me to ex-

hume from the depths of a dictionary—where he slept in peace, bearded and completely forgotten—this particular academician.

In the autumn the silhouette took inspiration from modern techniques with the "Profile" line. The following spring appeared the "Tulip" line, marked by the development of the bust and the narrowing of the hips.

Little by little the waist was being freed. Colors were inspired by the paintings of the Impressionists, and evoked the fields of flowers dear to Renoir and Van Gogh.

That was the year a young American designer wrote challenging me to a duel, on the pretext that I was disfiguring the American female figure which he was doing his best to enhance. To tell the truth, my adversary, by publishing our two photographs alongside each other, was aiming less at injuring me than at publicizing himself.

Six months later, when I had just founded a branch at Caracas, I launched the "Eiffel Tower" and "Cupola" lines, modeled on these two features of Paris skyline. I was seeking to vary and enliven the feminine silhouette. The material was to come alive on a woman's shoulders and her figure to come alive beneath the material.

In the spring of 1954, I brought out the "Lily of the Valley" line, inspired by my lucky flower, a young, graceful and simple line which was given unity by its color: Paris blue. Christian Dior had now reached the age of reason and celebrated his seventh birthday. He now occupied five buildings with twenty-eight workrooms, and employed more than a thousand persons. Eight independent firms and sixteen allied subsidiaries spread his label over five continents.

The namesake whom I had seen grow up at my side could feel well satisfied with himself. Letters and newspaper clippings from Australia, Florida, Germany, Italy and Spain

dubbed him in turn a madman, a criminal, a megalomaniac, a genius, a grand vizier, an emperor, or the dictator of fashion. A lawyer from Texas wrote asking for a Foreign Legion cap, complete with a white veil; and a woman living in Paris offered him her house for a ball "under the patronage of the masked princess." "Why not dress the ghosts of the great women lovers of the past?" she suggested.

From Alsace a woman who had lost everything, *Heimat, Habe und Gut*, wrote asking to be dressed just one time by Dior so as to "know heaven." She signed the letter "A poor dreamer, who has done no wrong." An Englishwoman, the wife of a magician, asked for an evening dress, on the grounds of similarity between my profession and that of her husband. An Italian tailor wrote on behalf of all his colleagues (*per tutti i sarti*) for a contribution toward the placing of a statue of the Archangel Michael, *patrone della categoria sarti*, on the Monte Sant' Angelo.

Let all these correspondents, from the kindest to the meanest, rest assured that I never read any of their letters. My secretary receives huge baskets full of them and is instructed to open them without ever referring them to me. It is she who provided me with the excerpts quoted above.

A line tremendously criticized and misinterpreted was my so-called "Stringbean" line; and I wish to recall its real nature and meaning. It was based on the lengthening and slimming of the bust, and suggested the tapering figure of a young girl, akin to that of the nymphs of the famous Fontainebleau school of painting. Its handling of style, purity, reserve and elegance was characteristic of that particular period of the Renaissance when the art of Jean Goujon flourished. The "H" line as I called it, was the last step of the liberation of the waist, which I had begun in 1952.

The morning after the presentation of the "H" line, Car-

men Snow cabled back to *Harper's Bazaar* in New York: "The 'H' line represents an even more important development than the New Look." Almost immediately the new line was christened the "Flat Look"; but it had never been my intention to create a flatness which would bring to mind a string bean. Be that as it may, the idea and main points of the new fashion, even misinterpreted as they may have been, were definitely launched, and there was nothing I could do to stop them. This time I got an indignant letter from a farmer in Idaho: "With your so-called genius, you have succeeded in disfiguring my wife. What would you say if I sent her over to you?"

The "A" and "Y" lines, which succeeded the "H" line, are still of too recent date for me to discuss them at length. In the spring of 1956 I brought out the "Arrow" line, which confirmed the tendencies first indicated by the two that preceded it. Line by line, silhouette by silhouette, that is the history of my house.

Now that you have become acquainted with it, I can ask you to cross the threshold with me.

Let us go in at number 30, avenue Montaigne. Once through the entrance way we find on our right the shop for Christian Dior-Delman shoes and on our left a hall which leads to the upper floors. On the mezzanine there is an ante-room which opens on one side onto the fitting rooms and on the other onto a hall leading to the Hat and Fur departments and also to a short stairway which takes us back down to the Boutique on the corner of the rue François I^{er} and the avenue Montaigne. The mezzanine links all the areas of the house connected with sales, which, along with the two salons, or showrooms, are the only ones seen by the general public.

Let us now climb the main stairway. On the second floor, immediately after a small landing, are the two grand salons and the mannequins' dressing room. The latter occupies what

used to be a dining room and has been divided horizontally in two, to provide closet space for all the models. The upper part is the balcony of which we have previously spoken. The dressing room is connected with the salons by a narrow passage, and through it dresses pass and pass again as though by a miracle.

Let us go up a few more steps. We pass the office of Mlle Vidmer, my private secretary, and the desks used by the personnel from our foreign branches, until we reach two large rooms where we sell models at reduced prices. These are directly over the salons of the second floor. Here hang dresses from past collections, private customers' unpaid orders and models unfinished at the time of the latest showing.

We shall go now to the fourth and top floor. Here are several secretarial offices and the studio of the artists who reproduce the models shown in the collection for the benefit of private customers. Three steps lead to the central business office, run by M. Rouët, general manager of all the Christian Dior enterprises, and M. Chastel, manager of the Paris house. These offices have been moved around many times since the original opening. Now on the fourth floor of 32, avenue Montaigne, they are headquarters for sales charts with entries of every customer's name, for production control and for the filing cards which contain a complete history of every model.

We drilled through a wall in order to connect number 30, avenue Montaigne with number 32, on the corner, whence we may now pass directly to 13, avenue François I^{er}. Here we go through the Boutique studio and arrive at my own, which occupies an entire floor. My readers have already set foot there several times as they followed the development of an original idea into the finished dress. Now we open a door at the left which leads to an anteroom, my private office and a room where I can rest at any hour of the day. On the courtyard

there are two fitting rooms where Mme Marguerite inspects all the dresses before they are presented to me. Beside these are the mannequins' lounge and a conveniently located hat workshop. Above, come two floors of studios and on the top floor the infirmary. Besides the medical care provided for them, my employees have the use of a country house at Vaires-le-Grand. Such a retreat is necessary for young women and girls who will never admit to the slightest fatigue and often must be practically forced to take a rest.

If we start down in the direction of the rue François I^{er}, we come first to the floor devoted to Gloves and Stockings, then to the beautiful main floor with its paneled walls and ornamental moldings, where Perfumes are housed. But there is another itinerary, a secret one, which we may now explore together. Let us use the glass-walled bridge across the courtyard, which we call the Bridge of Sighs, which leads directly into an eight-story building entirely occupied by workrooms. Let us take one of two stairways or one of two elevators all the way down to the basement. Here a lunchroom, brightened by ceiling lighting, serves over 1,000 persons, every noon at three successive sittings, and later on a mid-afternoon snack for the benefit of young apprentices.

As we come to the end of this tour, it is reasonable to suppose that more than once you may have lost your bearings. Cheer up! The same thing happens to me, and no descriptive plan can prevent it. The juxtaposition of the buildings, the abundance of doors and stairs, the bridge, and the number of people constantly moving up and down create the life of the business, in which I am happy to have had your company.

It is on St. Catherine's Day that you really should visit 30, avenue Montaigne. In our profession, this feast of our patron saint has remained tremendously important. For me, it has a deep meaning. I visit all the various departments and in the

little speech which I make to each workroom I try to express the sincere and tender affection which unites me to all those who join their efforts with mine, whatever their part, big or small, to achieve the success of our enterprises. On that day, in the welcome which is given me, in the decorations of the rooms, in the inventiveness of settings and costumes, I feel the pulse of the whole building. There is nothing gayer than St. Catherine's Day. Each workroom has its own orchestra, and throughout all the buildings there is one continuous ball.

I have described earlier how I installed a Boutique at the bottom of the staircase at 30, avenue Montaigne. In this enterprise I had the help of my dear friend, Carmen Colle, now the wife of François Baron, and the benefit of Christian Bérard's ideas for the decoration. It was a sort of little portico entirely papered with *toile de jouty*, decorated with sepia drawings. Carmen spent whole days, also draped in *toile de jouty*, perched on a ladder, seeing to the details, and arranging the sketches which "Bébé" Bérard had envisaged as decorating this pocket-sized shop.

The Boutique opened at the same time as my first collection. At first it offered only a choice of trinkets, such as jewels, flowers and scarves, but it was not long before more ambitious projects were undertaken. In the summer of 1948, Carmen suggested that the Boutique should also sell dresses, which, while they more or less follow the general lines of the collection, would be simpler and less elaborate in execution. Her idea was received with such enthusiasm that "The Boutique Collection" was born. Mme Linzeler, who had just joined us, looked after it, together with a fitter, Yvonne, and one assistant. Cramped most uncomfortably into one corner of a workroom, they performed miracles while Carmen, whose Boutique was already bursting at the seams, had to expand into the former apartment of the concierge.

While the gloves, perfumes, stockings and, later, ties, were introduced, the Boutique experienced, quite independently of the main collection, the feeling of presenting its wares to the gaze of the public. Each season it was entirely redecorated in the spirit of the big collection. It finally took over the studio, opposite it on the other side of the porch, set up its own studio and three workrooms, and soon had its own clientele, quite separate from the clientele "upstairs"! Abounding with novelties of all sorts, jam packed with gift counters, articles for men and even small pieces of furniture, it threatened to crack in half like a magician's egg, revealing a bouquet of colored handkerchiefs inside.

Elaborate negotiations were begun to get possession of the ground floor and second floor of the house in the rue François I^{er}. In June, 1955, the Boutique at the close of one evening was in 30, avenue Montaigne, and opened the next morning at the new address. This magic transfer took place during the night, under the direction of Marie-Hélène de Ganay, who replaced Carmen, the latter forced to choose between her family and the Boutique. In a few days Victor Grandpierre had created a Louis XVI "*Belle Époque*" Boutique, with all the conveniences of 1955, which exactly corresponded to my wishes. Surrounded by assistants, and caught up in a whirlwind of saleswomen transporting the stock, he spent the whole night putting the finishing touches to the décor.

When I arrived the next morning, I found that where only the night before there had been a mass of paint and step-ladders, there was now an exquisite and orderly Boutique. Somehow it had already managed to achieve the atmosphere of life and energy that I consider so vital to my house. There is nothing I detest more than a beautiful room deprived of the feeling of life; it is like a pretty woman who lacks charm. At half-past nine in the morning, the first client entered and

bought a coat, obviously without having any notion of the transformation that had taken place during the night.

I wanted a woman to be able to leave the Boutique dressed by it from head to foot, and even carrying in her hand a present for her husband. The display I was looking at showed me that I was not far from realizing my ambition. All the activities now associated with my name are to be found within the walls of the Boutique: stockings, gloves, and perfumes, whose growth paralleled that of the couture house.

The public has little idea of the care and worry which goes into both the search for a new perfume and its packaging. It is such an absorbing occupation that today I feel myself to be as much of a parfumeur as a couturier. I must not conclude this little picture of my subsidiary activities without mentioning the salon where, under the direction of my friend Roger Vivier, the most fashionable feet in the world are shod in Dior-Delman shoes.

PARIS TO NEW YORK
AND BACK AGAIN

WHILE the Boutique was undergoing these adventures, I was collecting together and sorting out in my mind all the varied impressions that I brought back from my first visit to America. Like all Frenchmen, I had been struck by the amazing wealth of the United States. Wastage there seemed not only natural but actually encouraged as a factor essential to the country's prosperity. Because of my upbringing, this philosophy of spending shocked me at first, but later the creative energy of the Americans encouraged me toward further creative enterprises of my own.

But before I could venture out into this new field, I had to get a firsthand knowledge of the situation. At the end of the Second World War, the United States was no longer a country of private luxury, while Europe, though bombed, had partially remained so. Thanks to mass production, America wanted to bring luxury within reach, if not of everyone, at least of the majority of the population.

In 1948, this was an important fact I had to take into account. I also had to consider the almost prohibitive American custom duties. Although the United States advocates international trade, it does so largely for its own benefit, in the manner of a child who plays only to win. This one-sided notion of exchange held back the revival of the huge dress trade that had made the fortunes of Parisian couturiers and *commissionnaires* between the two wars. Essentially a philanthropic country, America makes the mistake of offering aid to other coun-

tries in terms of charity—a concept more painful to the pride of ancient nations like ours than that of free trade. This, if I may say so, seems to me a shortsighted policy and an error, although it is perhaps scarcely the place of a Frenchman, whose own parliamentary government must give the permanent impression of political ineptitude, to say so.

To come back to dressmaking in particular: I realized that my Paris house would have to remain a laboratory, and its dresses prototypes, destined for a luxury clientele and professional buyers. If I wanted to reach the numerous well-dressed Americans who did not make an annual pilgrimage to Paris, I knew I would have to open a high-fashion ready-to-wear house in New York. It would be called Christian Dior-New York, to mark the difference between its models and those of the mother house in Paris. In other words, I intended to risk crossing the ocean and starting a new venture in a foreign land.

Many proposals had been made to me to work—as certain of my colleagues have since done—within the framework of an existing organization. But I preferred to remain independent, to preserve the dignity, distinction and pre-eminence of Parisian couture as much as possible. Also, in opening an American house, it seemed sporting to face the same problems and to run the same risks as an authentic American business.

I had to make two or three journeys to New York to launch my new project. A building and a staff had to be found; in short, a house had to be established, with all that this implies in the way of negotiation and hard work. Fortunately, Mrs. Engel, who has since become the manager of Christian Dior-New York, appeared at just the right moment to play the role of guardian angel. Doesn't her name speak for itself? Half-Russian and half-Swedish by birth, she combines the charm of the Slavs with the determination of the Scandinavians. Settled in America for a long time and knowing it extremely well,

she also understood immediately my own problems as a Frenchman. So she formed the ideal bridge between the different conceptions of the two continents. Her loyalty and warmth made up entirely for the strong-mindedness and impulsiveness—quite common to many American women—which I might otherwise have found excessive. She was a wonderful guide for all my research and my entry into the American way of life.

After many doubts and delays, I ended by renting a place of truly American proportions, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street, right in the heart of the city. I could not bring myself to work on Seventh Avenue, where most of the big clothing manufacturers are, as I thought its ready-to-wear atmosphere might become somewhat demoralizing. But the most difficult problem still remained to be solved: that of choosing the staff and most important, the production manager, that keystone of the fashion designer's arch. It was essential that I make a good choice, all the more because, despite my numerous inquiries, I knew very little about the American market. Once this exceptional person had been found, I was able to choose the manager of my salon and two saleswomen. As for the mannequins, they were relatively easy to find among the ravishing New York girls, who manage to protect their natural elegance from the effects of excessive sophistication. I did not dream of importing French girls, who would not have the desired style and whose proportions would have been all wrong for the American market. Of these American girls I must mention Mabel, the ideal mannequin, and Mary, who have both worked with me since the opening of my New York house. I have found in them the same co-operation and interest as in my Paris mannequins.

All our preliminary steps took place in an encouraging and relaxing atmosphere. America is the land where every new

enterprise, every original idea, encounters the warmest welcome and arouses the most lively interest. Nowhere else can the gap between an idea and its realization be bridged so straightforwardly. The Americans know how to take a chance; they offer you generously the whole armory of success. If things do not turn out right, it does not matter; there is always another race to be run, and there is absolutely no bitterness toward the horse that has failed. Fair play is a business rule. These are facts which a European, above all a Frenchman, accustomed to distrust, parsimony, and idle talk ought to acknowledge with gratitude.

Having once established the house on a sound business footing, I turned to my favorite concern: the interior decoration. Even though he is not a professional, I begged my friend Nicholas de Gunzburg to undertake it. His own background was proof enough that he was capable of creating the exact atmosphere I wanted—one suggesting at once New York and Paris. He was kind enough to agree, and I sailed for France entirely happy about the future of my new enterprise. A tentative date was fixed when the buildings would be ready to receive us, my staff and myself, to prepare the first collection.

When we returned to New York, nothing was ready—for, as I have said, Americans are not really in a hurry. They all seem honor bound to be late, particularly the contractors. As our own buildings were not ready for us to work in, we had to find a temporary solution. I decided to begin my work in the little house on Sixty-second Street where Mme Marguerite, Mme Bricard, Mme Raymonde and I were living. I turned the winter garden into a studio, the two drawing rooms into work-rooms, the pantry into a supply room and a bedroom into a dressing room for models. We tried to fit ourselves into the remaining rooms as best we could.

We were certainly camping. Thank heaven, the owner of

the house never had the bright idea of paying us a visit! She would have been absolutely horrified by what she saw. Literally piled one on top of the other, we ate while we had fittings; we slept beside the tables on which the material was being cut out; at every step we stumbled over rolls of fabrics, and never could remember when we went to the pantry whether we were supposed to be looking for napkins or a piece of cloth.

We all found this atmosphere very amusing, as we knew it was only temporary, but our amusement was not shared by the four lots of servants who came and went during the two and a half months of our occupation. None of them lasted longer in our service than the time they needed to give a week's notice. The first to go was an impeccable butler, an expert at serving cocktails but apparently at very little else. The indescribable untidiness of the house visibly disturbed him. When we presented him with the vacuum cleaner and the saucepans and told him to get to work, he could bear it no longer. Horrified, he left for bars more worthy of his talents. At the mere prospect of remaining alone in our tender care, the colored woman we had engaged to help him instantly left, without even asking for her wages.

A Swedish cook replaced them. Newly freed from the austerities and rationing of France, we were all eagerly looking forward to the Scandinavian specialties which we fondly imagined he was going to prepare for us. But apparently he was used to a grander setup, more in keeping with his Viking stature; he merely set fire to our doll's kitchen. Which done, he fled out into the street, insulting those who rushed to our rescue.

Next we pinned our hopes on two old Irishwomen. They, at least, would appreciate the charm of our bohemian household. At first our relations were idyllic, and the four of us spent whole evenings extolling the virtues of the Emerald Isle.

Alas, the dream did not last! The two old girls came to see us together and jointly gave notice. Their modesty was affronted by the nakedness of our timid mannequins.

Now we really thought we were lost. It was at this time that heaven chose to send to our rescue a wonderful Frenchwoman, actually a lady of the streets in search of an officially respectable profession. She was at the same time gay, reliable, and a wonderful cook. She immediately set about to worship and spoil us. With outrageously blonde hair, but an impeccable housedress, this treasure knew how to cook and clean, and she pampered us so much that we were at last free to look after our business concerns.

All this time the workrooms were a source of ceaseless anxiety to us. Ignorant of our methods, our American recruits found it impossible to understand why we insisted on having five or six rehearsals of a finished dress. In the conviction that the successful reproduction of a good drawing would result in the production of a well-made dress, they put our meticulous labors down to stupidity or clumsiness. In their opinion, only the worst of amateurs could possibly work with such care. Our insistence on perfection seemed absolutely inexcusable to them.

While I was battling with these and a thousand other cares, I found myself face to face with an unexpected major crisis. Everything seemed to be crumbling all at once, and for years afterward I remained under the impression that this country, supposedly the champion of freedom, was in fact a monstrous tyrant.

In order to protect our clients against the bad work of imitators, as I have explained, in Paris we had made our buyers sign a contract which pledged them not to reproduce our models except under certain conditions. This attempt to safeguard artistic production and a high standard of quality

was obviously not agreeable to everyone—any more than the opening of our New York branch was. Suddenly our harmless little contract threatened the success of our entire New York operation.

I have a horror of lawyers and legal proceedings. So I was appalled to receive one morning a summons to come to an Anti-Trust hearing. The very sight of a uniform fills me with a profound sensation of guilt. Now, flanked by two lawyers, I had to go to court, a much more ominous one than even the most austere similar establishment in France! I had to undergo a cross-examination of more than two hours, which even to this day I have never fully understood. My lost air, my obvious vagueness, saved me. I had no need to play a part. Because there was nothing I could tell them about the financial side of my affairs, my inquisitors soon saw that the wicked conspiracy into which I had supposedly entered had no serious basis. The buyers' contract was annulled, and this decision reinforced my conviction, concurred in by most reputable American colleagues, that in the United States the pillaging of artistic creation is not only authorized but actually encouraged. Nothing effective can be done to prevent it.

Finally, in spite of all obstacles, the collection put together in the little house on Sixty-second Street was ready, while the decoration of the building on Fifth Avenue was nearly finished. So several days before the opening of the season we were able to transfer workrooms and staff from one to the other. Nicholas de Gunzburg had decorated Christian Dior-New York in my beloved Louis XVI style and my favorite colors, white and Trianon gray, but with a touch of French Provincial instead of Paris 1910.

As the date of the opening drew near, I was overcome with an even more intense attack of nerves than I ordinarily experienced in Paris. I was dealing with a public which was

completely new to me. I had to keep my integrity and yet adapt myself to new types, very limited quantities of material, and to a much shorter showing. I was anxious to know if I had succeeded.

On the appointed day, the atmosphere in the salon disconcerted me. The peacefulness, most unlike the feverish atmosphere of the avenue Montaigne, was in some way demoralizing. The New York audience is much more relaxed, much more intent upon making itself comfortable. New York salons, like the theaters, are immense by French standards. Everyone wants an armchair reserved in advance which will serve as a protection against the waves of assault, and will enable him to see everything without turning his head. Air conditioning prevents both body and spirit from becoming overheated.

The applause which greeted the show was very different in caliber from the frenzy we were used to in Paris. The reserved air of the very same fashion reporters whom I had seen watch our show with visible excitement in France worried me, until I read their enthusiastic newspaper pieces. As a New York magazine editor explained, this frigid appearance is an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon.

"If pleasure varies in its expression from one continent to another, that does not mean it is any the less profound or sincere. In France you cry out, you kiss your neighbors to express your enthusiasm. In America, we are filled with the same exhilaration, only with us it is silent."

With the years, I have grown used to these contrasts, so that today, when this new house is successfully established, I feel that I am a genuine American designer in New York, just as I feel I am a French designer in Paris. Little by little, I have learned to understand the needs and wishes of an American clientele. The heat, natural in the summer, and artificial

in the winter, is of literally tropical intensity. No dress can be too thin, too light or too cool. Apartments are relatively small; night life is intense and actively carried on in clubs and other public places. There is a great demand for short evening gowns and rather dressy dining-out clothes. But of course the real masterpieces of American design are the cocktail dresses, the cocktail being the symbol par excellence of American sophistication. For the daytime, a suit is the indispensable uniform, and the famous little black dress so dear to Parisians is seldom worn.

On the whole, American women—with the exception of those who buy their clothes in France—attach less importance to the details of the fit and the finish of a dress than to the general effect it produces. They are attracted by variety and frequent change, and for this reason their streets are much gayer than those of Europe where luxury dwells behind closed doors. Moreover, the high living standard narrows the gap between the leisure and the working classes. The Cadillac, a rather splashy sight in Paris, passes unnoticed in the midst of a crowd of other cars almost equally luxurious, belonging to office clerks or even elevator boys. In the same way luxurious clothes do not seem as scandalous or provocative as they do in France.

Since we have crossed the Atlantic, let us now pass from one America to the other. Christian Dior-Caracas is a charming miniature reproduction of the Paris house. It bears witness to the kinship of the Latin peoples. Throughout the length of my stay in Caracas, despite the exotic countryside, the exuberance of nature and people, the immense richness and taste for display, I never once felt myself far away from home. When chance or necessity takes you far from your native land, how comforting it is to rediscover its essential qualities and even its defects in another land.

One last trip, then, back to Paris. When one returns from the New World, all our intra-European differences suddenly seem very small. And so I hardly feel that my new London branch—which I shall describe next—is in a foreign country.

CHRISTIAN DIOR-LONDON

BECAUSE my London house is my last born, I am probably devoting more time to it at the moment than to any of my other establishments. I am captivated by its novelty, of course, but it has another charm all of its own. To me it is part of England, England whose charms I first discovered in my twenty-first year.

It was in 1926. The time for me to enter the Army was approaching, and I persuaded my parents to allow me to spend several months in Great Britain to perfect myself in my study of the language, and spend my last months before military service in this country which attracted me so much.

Was it because I was just twenty-one? Was it because I was, for the first time in my life, absolutely free? For I felt myself far enough from my family to be independent and at the same time near enough to them to summon their aid if need be. Or was it simply because in that year London was more beautiful than ever? Whatever the truth, I cherish an unforgettable memory of my visit.

The happy memories of one's youth are long lasting. Every one of my subsequent visits to England has given me the same sensation of happiness and personal liberty that I experienced on my first visit. For one thing I love being in a country where the past lies so vividly around me. And now that I am a couturier I have the special pleasure of dressing English women, whom I consider to be among the most beautiful and distinguished in the world. When an English-

woman is pretty, she is prettier than a woman of any other nationality. I adore the English, not only when they are dressed in the tweeds which suit them so well but also in those subtly colored flowing dresses that they have worn inimitably since Gainsborough's day.

The world of English fashion was not unknown to me, for I had had the honor of showing my Paris collection in London before I actually set up a separate English house. It was the autumn of 1947 and my second Paris collection. Mrs. Doris Langley Moore, who has just opened a delightful Costume Museum in London, organized a sumptuous presentation of it at the Savoy. It took place on a Friday, and the next morning my staff and I found ourselves involved in the plot of a real thriller. Through the good offices of Mme Massigli, wife of the French Ambassador in London, it was arranged for us to show the dresses privately to Her Majesty the Queen, now the Queen Mother, and to Princess Margaret, the Duchess of Kent, and her sister, Princess Olga of Yugoslavia. These ladies were all devoured with curiosity to see the New Look of which they had heard so much.

As neither the police nor the press had been notified, we had to act with the greatest possible discretion in order not to attract attention. The huge ball dresses, their voluminous skirts concealed by covers, were smuggled out of the service door of the Savoy. The whole operation took place amidst a telltale rustle of material and constant hasty "sshs." Finally all of us, mannequins, staff and dresses, arrived at the exquisite Embassy which Mme Massigli had done so much to beautify. We had one final chaotic rather emotional rehearsal there, in order to get used to the different floor levels. The mannequins were all taught how to reconcile royal protocol with the other strict protocol—that of the show.

I was told that the Queen would graciously exchange a few



A serious little boy



*A visit to the
Flea Market with
Christian Bérard*



(Homes and Gardens)

*My favorite room in
the Boulevard
Jules Sandeau*



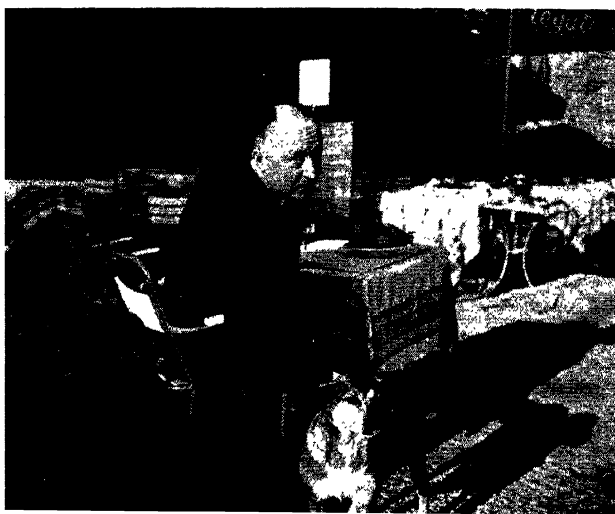
© André Ostier

*The mill of Coudret,
near Milly*



© Pierre Perrottino

My house at Montauroux



words with me once the show was over; and may I add that, whatever the French may say, they are all fervent royalists at heart! Certainly I am. Face to face with the Queen, I was instantly struck by her elegance, for which I had been quite unprepared, and the atmosphere of graciousness which she radiates. The mauve dress and draped hat that she wore would have been quite inconceivable on any one else—but on her they looked wonderful and I felt that nothing else would have shown her to such advantage. Every one of us felt the warmth and charm of her smile.

Beside the Queen was Princess Margaret. At that time she was the focus of the widespread and frantic interest in royalty. The public had reason to adore her. She is a real fairy princess, delicate, graceful, exquisite. I had heard that she is also extremely intelligent and witty, but her poise and the formality of the occasion prevented me from finding out for myself. Later, however, when she was in Paris, she honored my salon with a visit, and I found that she was keenly interested in fashion and also, unlike many women, knew exactly what style best suited her tall, fragile, Titania-like figure.

To return to this little ceremony at the French Embassy—you can imagine that we walked on air back to the Savoy.

That very same afternoon, Norman Hartnell, the court dressmaker, came to call on me at the hotel. He had seen the show the day before, and told me that he thought my collection so pretty that in his opinion it was worthy of being shown to Her Majesty! Here was a delicate situation. How to tell him that it had already been done? Fortunately—thanks to his extremely good manners—the incident passed off without any embarrassment.

It was with a very light heart that I attended a cocktail party that evening in honor of French Fashion, given by the most important English fashion designers, the "Top Ten."

My second glowing recollection of England is also associated with Princess Margaret. This was in 1954 when she attended a showing of my clothes at Blenheim Palace, organized by the Duchess of Marlborough for the benefit of the Red Cross.

The thirteen mannequins who were chosen for the visit to Blenheim arrived the evening before the show, accompanied by Mme de Turckheim and the publicity department. Two of us preferred to go by boat—myself and Renée, with her famous horror of the air. The mannequins had supper at the palace, and were then put up by the Duchess' neighbors, or at hotels in Woodstock.

When I arrived the next morning, my first thoughts were completely unrelated to fashion! I was struck dumb with admiration at the magnificence of Blenheim itself, the beauty of the park, where the leaves were red on the trees, and the exquisite lake. The palace itself had been built for the Duke of Marlborough by Queen Anne, in recognition of his great victories over the French. When I saw the two flags of France and England fluttering together in the afternoon wind over the palace, I silently asked Marlborough's pardon for having set up the triumphant standard of French fashion in such a place. At any moment I expected his indignant ghost to join the line of mannequins.

The poor girls, incidentally, had never felt so nervous in all their lives as they paraded through fourteen salons all hung with tapestries celebrating the defeat of the French. Used to the tiny showing space of the French salons, they found it difficult to adjust themselves to marching through what seemed miles of rooms before 2,000 people. They had to remember to curtsy to the Princess as well.

This show at Blenheim—one of the rare showings of my collections which I have myself attended—remains in my

memory for several reasons, quite apart from the beauty of the setting. Just as it was over, I was assailed by a charming crowd of Red Cross nurses who pressed me and my mannequins for autographs. I was made an honorary member of the English Red Cross, and presented with a scroll to that effect signed by Princess Margaret.

I learned afterward that for the girls at least all the excitement did not finish with the end of the show. I myself was worn out and took the boat-train back to Paris once the show was over, but the mannequins remained at Blenheim for a dinner and dance organized by the Duchess, and finally set out for London in the wee, small hours of the morning. But in the general confusion of Blenheim, and arriving in London so late, their luggage was hopelessly muddled. Everybody had everybody else's toilet case and overnight bag. As the mannequins were staying at half a dozen London hotels, it would have been the height of folly to drive madly around the sleeping city to try to straighten out the confusion. Lia burst into a storm of tears and Mme de Turckheim struggled in vain to rally the morale of her troupe, which had to depart at six o'clock the next morning—it was nearly that already—in order to be ready to show at the avenue Montaigne in the afternoon.

All this time, my desire to set up a house of my own in London was growing. My good friends Simone and Serge Mirman helped me carry out the project. The first show came fully up to my expectations and I was greatly moved by its excellent press reception. Among the English journalists who attended it I should like to mention particularly Iris Ashley who knows so well how to write intelligently on a subject that is often surrounded with so much nonsense. At Dior we always take special note of her presence and eagerly await her impressions of our latest showing.

Even after the founding of my English house, I have one

more happy memory of bringing my Paris collection to London. In April, 1955, Lord Inverclyde, chairman of the "Friends of France," founded in Glasgow during the war to assist the French sailors from Brest evacuated there, and the honorary secretary, Mr. E. J. Vacher, asked me to bring over my mannequins for a benefit. There were actually two shows—one at the Central Hotel in Glasgow and one at Gleneagles, both in the presence of a brilliant company. Present were M. Chauvel, the new Ambassador of France and his wife, the Lord Provost and his wife, and all the Scottish nobility, among them the delightful Duchess of Buccleugh. The announcer had a great number of titles to insert in his introduction:

"My Lord Provost, your Excellencies, Your Grace, my lords, ladies and gentlemen . . ."

After the show there was an unexpected contrast which delighted my French eyes; the parade of the girls in their delicate evening dresses was followed by Scottish reels danced by magnificently kilted Scottish gentlemen. It looked wonderful, but beneath the frenzied steps of the dance the floor shook until we were all afraid that it would collapse. Noticing the worried expressions on our faces, the Lord Provost told us the floor had been constructed so as to shake in just this way, to give the reels added animation.

I lingered a little in Scotland. I had heard so much about the beauty of this country that I had feared I would be disappointed. But, on the contrary, the country, its castles and the moors, surpassed my expectations.

And so back to Paris, once more. Now, if you will allow it, the dress designer will bow out. He has spoken quite enough—perhaps too much—of his all-absorbing profession. Now he will do one last dangerously daring thing: he will speak about himself.

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PART IV

THE ADVENTURE
OF MY LIFE

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MY EARLY YEARS

AT THE BEGINNING of this book I warned all those who love intimate confidences or scandalous anecdotes, in short all gossip-mongers, that my story would leave them unsatisfied. The creation and success of a fashion establishment, a survey of its life behind the scenes, so little known in spite of its rumored glamour, an account of my travels and their relation to the spread of French fashion . . . these are the only subjects which could justify my laying down the scissors and taking up the pen.

Now having described the house of Christian Dior, I must bring myself, however reluctantly, to describe the other Christian Dior: myself. Self-portrayal is always difficult. Can anyone ever really know himself? Probably the simplest way to give you an idea of my own character is to take you with me into the various houses in which I have lived since my childhood. Possibly I am merely giving in to my confessed weakness for interior decoration and architecture—my first and truest vocation—but I am sure that this attempt at indirect biography will be more revealing than a straightforward account of my life. A man is to a large degree the product of his surroundings.

Our house at Granville, like all Anglo-Norman buildings of the end of the last century, was perfectly hideous. All the same I look back on it with mingled tenderness and wonder. In a certain sense, my whole way of life was influenced by its architecture and situation.

My parents bought it as a young married couple a year or two after I was born. It stood on top of a cliff (deserted at that time but since then completely built up) in the middle of a large area—now a public park—planted with young trees which grew, as I did, against the wind and the tides. This is no figure of speech, since the property hung right over the sea, which could be seen through the gate, and it lay exposed to all the turbulence of the weather, as if in prophecy of the troubles of my own life.

To my child's eyes a cluster of young pines, two feet high, was a virgin forest. It has not lost this meaning for me, for to-day I should be overshadowed by the high branches. But the walls which encompassed the garden were not enough, any more than my parents' sheltering care, to shield us from all storms.

My father owned factories for making fertilizers and chemicals, founded in 1832 by a great-great-grandfather who had been one of the first Europeans to have the idea of importing guano from Chile. All the family was of Norman stock, except for the drop of "Anjou sweetness" brought in by my mother, the only thin person with a small appetite in our clan of *bon vivants* and hearty eaters. Granville itself, half a mile away, was for nine months of the year a peaceful little port and for the three summer months a fashionable suburb of Paris. In those days there were not the facilities for travel which have lately turned summer vacationists into nomads and bathing places into camping sites. Granville, like all the smart Normandy seaside places had a regular influx of faithful visitors. Dancing classes for the young, the casino with its *petits chevaux* and light music, and flower shows, all were well patronized by a Parisian public that had come to the shore with its trunks, children and servants, determined to abide by its time-honored way of life.

For the other nine months, as we were cut off on our property like an island, far from the commercial atmosphere of the town, we hardly saw anybody. This isolation suited my tastes. A passion for flowers inherited from my mother meant that I was at my happiest among plants and flower beds. This passion even influenced my reading and, with the exception of a few books which made their mark on my whole childhood, my chief delight was to learn by heart the names and descriptions of flowers in the illustrated catalogues of the firm of Vilmorin-Andrieux.

From the bedside books I had as a child, I remember above all Perrault's fairy tales with the Gustave Doré illustrations, and a very "modern" story with pictures by Métivet. I was thrilled by these pictures, as I was to be later by the decoration of the main cabin of the *Nautilus* in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*—to me the pinnacle of luxury and beauty. I was a good, well-brought-up little boy, watched over by vigilant *fräuleins*, and quite incapable of facing the hurly-burly of life.

At the beginning of this book I described my reluctance to leave my home for an instant—a reluctance which did not stop my first children's parties from making a great impression on me. I could be amused for hours by anything that was sparkling, elaborate, flowery or frivolous. The return of the deep-sea fishermen or of a three-master bringing guano to the family warehouses were exciting indeed but actually interested me far less. As for the few visits I made to my father's factories, they have left appalling memories. I am sure my horror of machines and my firm resolve never to work in an office or anything like it stems from those visits.

My childhood home was roughcast in a very soft pink, mixed with gray gravel, and these two shades have remained my favorite colors in couture. As my mother had a passion for

green plants, a 1900 wrought-iron conservatory had been stuck on to the front of the house without the least attempt at harmony. Years later, when I moved to Paris, my first wish was to find a house with a winter garden.

The front door opened onto an entrance hall and the beginning of a big flight of stairs. The whole of this area was decorated in imitation pine picked out with bamboo borders. Over every door there was a kind of pagoda roof of bamboo and straw. Large panels painted in imitation of Japanese prints adorned the whole staircase. These versions of Utamaro and Hokusai made up my Sistine Chapel. I can remember gazing at them for hours on end as, perched on some exotic footstool of tooled leather, I would timidly finger the rustling beads of a curtain. How many bruises I got from falling off one of these so-called seats, designed for everything except sitting!

Those long meditations left me with a strong taste for *Japonaiseries* on screens. I still love those silks embroidered with flowers and fantastic birds and use them in my collections.

Our drawing room was done in Louis XV style, with jarring modernistic touches, and the genuine and the *faïence* were delightfully mingled. Cabinets, with the glass divided into sections by gilt, like those found in auctions today, were for me an inexhaustible source of wonder. Behind the glass were crowded marquises and shepherdesses, supposedly from Saxony, with skirts trimmed in roses and lace, multicolored Venetian glass, forever catching some new ray of light, bonbon dishes of every kind and, finally, enormous fans! Into vases on the chimney piece were crammed Gynérium (those "feather dusters" that I still love) and satin flowers.

The sitting room was cosier and decorated in Second Empire style inherited from grandparents; the walls were covered with a yellow *moiré* paper that I had the luck to find again for

my house in Paris. As for my father's study, it filled me with religious awe. It contained a Renaissance wall clock in pewter adorned with halberdiers who seemed terribly formidable to me, and a mask of a Negress that looked as if it were about to eat me. Blustering and mustachioed musketeers, engraved after Roybet, completed my trepidation. Gentle though my father was, I never went into this room without a slight tremor of fear. But in I went either to listen to a little sermon or to wonder at the mysteries of the telephone, a thrilling novelty which had not yet palled.

I was frightened a little, too, by the Henri II dining room, with its red and yellow stained-glass windows, although in the end I came to love it. For it was the dining room, and I was even then rather *gourmand*. Besides it was done in the style of the Perrault fairy tales that I loved so much. Lions and mythical creatures reared up at each other on sideboards and cupboards, and a very pretty lady in Renaissance garb smiled down from a windowpane. My delight did not resist the assaults of time; today, by reaction, I am unfairly prejudiced against the furnishings of the chateaux of the Loire, and only by dint of great will power have I come to appreciate fine Renaissance furniture.

In my own room I was particularly fond of the round plaque in the middle of the ceiling from which hung a night light of multicolored glass that had gleamed while I convalesced from measles and chickenpox. Nearby was the playroom, with a dark cupboard into which my brother went more often than I. But the place I loved more than any other—was this fate?—was the linen room. There the housemaids and seamstresses, hired for the day, told me fairy stories and sang *Hirondelle du faubourg* or the cradle song from *Jocelyn*. Dusk drew on, night fell and there I lingered, forgetting my books and my brother, absorbed in watching the women around the oil lamp

plying their needle. This, then, was the happy, leisurely country life from which my parents suddenly snatched me at the age of five by deciding to live in Paris. From that time on, stormy nights, foghorns, the tolling of the cemetery bell, and even the Norman drizzle that went with my childhood, all make me homesick.

Every year we used to pay a visit to our grandparents in Paris. I had fairy-tale memories of these visits. In them were mixed the discovery of electricity and the tragic apostrophe of Jules Verne's Michael Strogoff at the *Châtelet Théâtre*: "Open your eyes wide, Michael Strogoff, wide!" There were also *The Devil's Pills* and *Around the World in Eighty Days* and the movies then showing at Dufayel's.

I was five years old, a wonderful age to see and retain every impression before the arrival of the depression logic of the "age of reason." I thank heaven I lived in Paris in the last years of the *Belle Époque*. They marked me for life. My memory holds a picture of a time full of happiness, exuberance and peace in which everything was directed toward the art of living. The general carefree atmosphere derived from the fact that the capital of the rich as well as the savings of the poor seemed immune from any sudden upheaval. The future, it seemed, could hold only greater comfort for everybody. No matter what life has granted me since, nothing will ever equal the sweet memory of that period.

To get to Paris, we had to take a nightmare journey in one of the first Peugeot limousines, which were truly gigantic, not only to my childish eyes but even in the idea I have of it today. This machine included four rows of benches and folding seats on which ten of us sat—four children, my parents, my grandmother, the governess, a housemaid, and a fellow we called the "mechanic." All of us were shrouded in dusters, our faces swathed in veils, the women topped with cumbersome feath-

ered hats, and the young boys with dashing "Jean-Bart" sailor caps. Overhead a heavy pile of luggage and spare tires filled up the copper rack on the roof. What rapture, after innumerable breakdowns and punctures, to arrive at last at "La Mulette," rue Richard Wagner. (How silly to change the name to rue Albéric-Magnard, after 1914!)

Our new house, bursting with the *Japonaiseries* of Granville—souvenirs from a World Exposition—showed its modernism by being definitely eighteenth century in style. It was there that I discovered and was conquered forever by Louis XVI—Passy, with its white enameling, doors with little bevel-edged panels, window flounces, knotted-bar net curtains, panels of cretonne or damask depending on the degree of luxury of the room, interspaced with rococo flowers thought to be "Pompadour" but which were in fact in the style of "Vuillard." Nothing could be more welcoming, more warm, and at the same time lighter than these houses lit by electric fittings shaped like tulips or Louis XVI candelabra in brackets, with flames molded in ground glass. Austerity of style or judgment had not yet wrought its havoc. From my bedroom window—we lived on the fifth floor—I could see, on one side, the trees of the park of La Mulette (later to be the Henri de Rothschild house) and, on the other, at the end of the street, a huge intoxicatingly Gothic house, now torn down.

Nearer at hand I was intrigued by a one-story house whose meaning I could not fathom, but whose colonnaded loggia overhanging the too narrow front door fascinated and intrigued me. Forty years later, I was able to penetrate the mystery, since that is actually the house in which I live today. But the supreme wonder stood not far away, in the rue Octave-Feuillet, a real Persian minaret of 1910, with a glazed roof, blue and gold, which ridiculously severe city planning caused to be destroyed. What a pity! It was the one substantial re-

minder of the "Persian" fashion brought to Paris in the train of the Ballet Russe. The Iribe style reigned everywhere. Nobody talked of anything but Nijinsky, the Persian Ball given by the Marquise de Chabrillan, divided skirts, hobble-skirted dresses, and the tango. Louis XVI retreated, or died smothered in the cushions of Scheherazade.

The year 1914 began with the famous eclipse and with ominous scandals; the Bonnot gang in the red automobile started the fashion for gangsters. In secret I began to read *Fantomas* and *Arsène Lupin*. A well behaved pupil at Gerson, I received hardly any bad marks in spite of the annoyance I caused some teachers by my habit of covering my school books with innumerable outlines of a woman's leg surmounting a high-heeled shoe.

The mobilization order caught us by surprise on a holiday at Granville. At first our *fräulein* refused to go, since she thought, as everyone did, that the cataclysm was impossible. When war broke out, she—who had lived completely as one of the family—declared to our terrified amazement that she was ready, if need be, to go "bang-bang" at the French soldiers. Soon there began the story of the refugees and other less sinister ones. We were still too young for wartime to be for us the period of "the devil in the flesh," but it was one of great freedom and improvised lessons under the guidance of teachers who were more or less amateurs.

During this time the womenfolk, kept busy with making bandages, working in hospitals, getting letters from the front, and having therapeutic sessions for their beloved wounded, left us alone. They were suddenly staggered by the arrival of a fashion magazine from Paris, announcing that the Parisians were wearing short skirts and "aviator boots" with uppers of black, tartan or bronze laced up to the knees. Disapproval was unanimous and powerful. All the same, on that very day, each

one hastened to order boots and short skirts from Paris by the evening mail. Such was the heedless frivolity of a generation which lived through a conflict in which all its values were swept away, as though it were only a make-believe war. A little later, despite the bombardment of Big Bertha, everyone was busy learning the first bars of *Tipperary* or the Y.M.C.A. songs. Hell reigned at Verdun, but in the rear all ears were alert to the rhythm of two-steps, and later one-steps and fox trots. But all this was only outward show; it was really a way of bolstering up morale during the hardest ordeal men and women had ever had to undergo.

I shall pass over the numerous changes of home and school caused by the vicissitudes of war and go on to 1919 and our new and more lasting home in Paris. It was near the avenue Henri-Martin, in an apartment where yet another eighteenth-century style reigned; it was thought to be very pure, but was in fact only eighteenth-century *à la* 1920.

This was the postwar period, a completely new epoch and a fresh start for everyone, including us fifteen-year-olds. We were wonderfully in keeping with our times. Officially I was supposed to be studying at the Tannenberg School for my *bachelor* examinations but, even then, with my friends, I was falling under the influence of music, literature, painting, and all the manifestations of the new trend in the arts. One had to follow the crowd by not missing a single opening or surprise party, and by sharing with the century itself the unique privilege of belonging to the age of folly. There were nights without sleep, and Negro music, drinking bouts without hangovers, light amours and serious friendships. I explored the four corners of the new Paris, alive with intentions, cosmopolitan, intelligent, prodigal with truly novel novelties. I used to frequent the picture shops on the rue de la Boétie and, soon, certain more select galleries on the Left Bank, like the tiny stall

of Jeanne Bucher, austere and charming priestess of the primitives and Cubists. Modern art still had something of the Black Mass about it. Besides, black was in vogue. The influence of the war—mourning and blackout combined with cubist severity—had banished from houses jade and gold cushions, and violet and orange lamps, the whole orgy of Oriental colors, the short-lived conquerors of the White Louis XVI of 1910.

No doubt the Dunand lacquers, Ruhlmann's macassar consoles and Coromandel screens retained their sumptuous sway in luxury hotels, dance floors and the apartments of stage figures such as Spinelly or Fernande Cabanel. But the radical revolution of Le Corbusier and Pierre Chareau was carried out with the clean sweep of a Saint-Just or a Robespierre, and banished all ornamentation. Everything had to be functional, whether architecture, furniture or clothes. And, as the decade from 1920 to 1930 was a rich one, luxury was shown in subdued materials—reinforced cement, plain wood. In fashion Chanel ordained jerseys, and tweeds; Reboux, untrimmed felt cloche hats. By contrast with the rationalism of the applied arts, the Fine Arts—painting, poetry and music—became inconsequential. Bonnard, Vuillard, Ravel and Debussy, all seemed too formless and a little out of date; the new gods were Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Stravinsky and Schönberg. The Dadaists freed language from the tyranny of precise meaning. And shining over every avant-garde effort was the blazing light of Jean Cocteau.

The "Boeuf-sur-le-Toit" bar was the Mecca of this gay esotericism. It seems odd that in 1956 people should pin the label of "avant-garde" on men and works that we admired between the ages of fifteen and twenty, and who had already been known for ten years to our more enlightened elders, led by Guillaume Apollinaire.

With so many things to distract me, I cannot imagine how I succeeded in passing my examinations. The time had come to turn from a schoolboy into a student. Driven by my love of architecture, I suggested to my family that I should study at the Beaux Arts. An outcry greeted this proposal. No, my place was not with the Bohemians! To gain time and to enjoy the greatest possible liberty, I signed myself up at the School of Political Science in the rue Saint-Guillaume, which entailed no commitments. In this hypocritical way I contrived to carry on the life of my choice.

What a hectic life it was! German expressionistic films with Conrad Veidt and Louise Brooks: the Ballet Russe whose Bakst and Benóit sets were then replaced by those of the new Cubist designers; the really avant-garde shows of the Swedish Ballet; Cocteau's *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* set to music by "The Six," with sets by Jean and Valentine Hugo, and *Entracte* by René Clair and Satie. There were Count Etienne de Beaumont's evening parties, and the productions of Dullin, Baty and the Pitoëffs. They played Chekov, Giraudoux, and Claudel, even Bruckner's *Le Mal de la Jeunesse*, forerunner of Existentialism. These were performed as often as not in old stables or other improvised theaters. Then we discovered the archaic: the art of Africa, China, and Peru . . . nothing was too primitive for us! In the circus there were the Fratellini, in music hall or vaudeville Mistinguett, Chevalier, the Dolly Sisters and, soon after, Josephine Baker. Songs by Damia, the uncontested queen of realism; by Raquel Meller who bombarded the room with violets; by Fortuné, who was a cross between Bourvil and Trenet. On her trapeze Barquette achieved the synthesis of man, woman and bird of paradise. It was truly at this period that everything which now seems the height of novelty to half-educated people was painted, spoken or done. My par-

ents were in despair at having a son so incapable of any serious concern. They were wrong, because in that varied spiritual climate I formed not only the taste but also the friendships which were to give shape and meaning to the serious side of my life.

FRIENDSHIP AND FRUSTRATIONS

IF I were asked: "How did you come to meet your friends?"—I should answer that since we came from quite different backgrounds we met purely by chance, or rather in obedience to those mysterious laws which Goethe called elective affinities. Could I say there was any family resemblance? This might be supposed from the fact that some among us have left the stamp of our personality upon the art of our times. To tell the truth, however, we never dreamed of being one of those groups with a group theory like the Pléiade, the Encyclopedists, the Barbizon School or the Bateau Lavoir. We were just a simple gathering of painters, writers, musicians and designers, under the aegis of Jean Cocteau and Max Jacob.

In order to make up for my leaving the School of Political Science I contrived, not without difficulty, to get my parents' permission to study musical composition. Very soon I was a passionate champion of the movement which had begun under the impulse of Satie and Stravinsky with the *Groupe des Six*, and then the Arcueil School. Strange evening parties were held in our home. Sitting on the floor, in the regulation semi-darkness of that date, we would play modern music of a kind that sent our elders into fits of horror. On those nights, my father and mother used to fly for sanctuary to their own rooms.

A young Dutch musician, who has since become a diplomat, brought Henri Sauguet to one of these sessions. His lively eyes, sparkling with malice behind his spectacles, the immense mobility of his face, the intelligence and humor of his talk, in fact

all the qualities of Latin alertness in this man from Coutras in the Gironde, were altogether dazzling to the silent and slow Norman that I am. He was already known, and to me he seemed tremendously famous. Had there not just been a concert at the *Theatre des Champs-Élysées* itself, where his works had been applauded? That night he played his *Françaises* on the piano and his music did away with all differences among us. It was what I should have dreamed of writing if Heaven had granted me the gift of being a true musician. Henri Sauguet appeared from his very first works as the reviver of the spontaneous, sensual and anti-scholastic style. Soon we were close friends and it was through him—one of the best composers of his generation—that I was to meet the man who was to be one of the foremost painters of the time.

This was a fair young fellow, slender and smooth cheeked, whose enormous blue eyes had already told him that the human face and people's lives were worthy of far greater attention than the simplified still lives of the Cubists or the geometrical figures of the "abstract" painters. His name was Christian Bérard. His drawings taught one to transform daily life into a magic world of passion and nostalgia. I bought as many of his sketches as I could, and covered the walls of my room with his inspired paintings. Through Sauguet again I came to know Pierre Gaxotte who took almost as much interest in music and dancing as in history, and Jean Ozenne, another friend, then in dressmaking, who was to have a decisive influence on my as yet unforeseen career as a couturier. What extraordinary meetings those were, colored by Montparnasse and Anglomania, where we enjoyed the pleasures of friendship. Our bowler hats were the equivalent of today's turtle-neck pullovers and we were inspired with the same burning curiosity as the youth of today.

Through successive postponements I had escaped military service, like all the students of my age. But in 1927 when the fireworks of the 1925 Decorative Arts Exposition had subsided, I finally had to join up. Naturally my family's comfortable position had made me a professed anarchist, as well as a pacifist, and so I refused officers' training. My time was passed as a private in the Fifth Regiment of Engineers, which luckily enough was stationed at Versailles and thus did not take me far from Paris. My new and austere life gave me time for contemplation and I meditated on the profession I must choose once I was free. I settled on the most sensible course, one that must have seemed the deepest folly to my parents—the ownership of an art gallery!

After I had turned a deaf ear to all their objections I was given some hundreds of thousands of francs, with the express condition that I was never to let my name appear in the title of the firm. To have one's name over a shop was considered by my parents to be the lowest degree of social shame. (Poor parents! What would they say today when my name is even displayed on a book!) In partnership with a friend, Jacques Bonjean, I opened a little gallery at the end of a rather squalid dead-end street, the rue de la Boétie. Our ambition was to show the masters we admired the most—Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Dufy—and the younger painters we knew personally and already held in high esteem: Christian Bérard, Salvador Dali, Max Jacob and the Berman brothers. If only I could have kept that stock of paintings held by my family in such light esteem! They would be of incalculable value! Fashion design will never put such a fortune in my hands!

It was at an exhibition of the work of Max Jacob that I met a young poet just arrived from the country, named Pierre Colle, who became my close friend. He soon left poetry to be

a picture dealer, in which his flair, intelligence and business sense brought him dazzling success, all too quickly shattered by his untimely death.

We often went to pay a call on our master and friend, Max Jacob. At that time he lived on the rue Nollet in a curious little hotel, the miniature of a luxury establishment. Comfortable rooms, moderate prices, and the pleasures of community life had drawn to the Hotel Mollet a cluster of young men completely diverse in temperament and gifts but united in affection for Max, horror of pedantry and worship of the light touch. In a wonderful atmosphere of laughter and fun I came to know Maurice Sachs, devoured with the desire to become a writer and already in spite of himself an adventurer; Georges Geoffroy, then a fashion designer; Marcel Herrand, the scenery designer who was already famous; and André Fraigneau, a lecturer at Grasset's and not yet a novelist. Henri Sauguet lived a few steps away on the rue Truffaut. He used to come and work with Max Jacob on unfinished operettas, for which Christian Bérard did designs and ideas for costumes.

What mad evenings they were, and what wonderful improvisations took place! To the music of a gramophone, Max, who seemed the youngest of us all, would discard his shoes and dance in red socks, mimicking a whole corps de ballet to Chopin's *Preludes*. Sauguet and Bérard, costumed in lampshades, bedspreads and curtains, would turn themselves into all the characters of history. It was my part in those first charades that enabled me, twenty years later, to act the "Couturier on Tour" at Dallas, Texas, with the necessary gusto. The year 1928, that apex of my carefree youth, will always be a red-letter year in my memory; anything and everything seemed likely to succeed. Our gallery had a not unpromising start, good enough to reassure my family. After 1925 the virus of speculation had penetrated even into that class of society least inclined to run

after quick money. Everything had to make a profit—business and art as much as finance. Since young people held revolutionary views, I used to have frequent arguments with my father—ending with a slammed door and the formidable invective: “Dirty bourgeois!” which left the author of my days in dumfounded consternation.

1929. The Wall Street crash, forerunner of a world-wide depression, passed almost unnoticed in Paris. America was still a distant country in those days. I heard friends talking about the worries of fashion designers faced with the sudden disappearance of their New World clientele, but I was as yet far away from this trade and, as for the stocks that slumped, no one doubted that they would soon be rising again.

The year 1930. At the end of the holidays came a portent which alarmed me more than the financial crash. In our empty house, a mirror came unhooked and smashed to pieces on the floor. At once misfortune came into our hitherto happy and sheltered family. My brother was stricken with an incurable nervous disease, and my mother, whom I adored, faded away and died of grief.

Looking back on it now I see that it was fortunate that her death came when it did, in spite of the indelible marks it left upon me, for she was spared knowledge of the perilous future unfolding before us. Within a few days, at the beginning of 1931, my father, who had put his capital into real estate, was completely ruined. Everything now considered a secure investment—land, *objets d'art*, paintings, not to mention stocks and shares—had to be hurriedly sold out at a low price.

For my part, this series of dramatic events resulted in a “flight to the East.” The desperate search for a new solution to the problems raised by this capitalist crisis drove me, very naively, to put together a few thousand francs and join a group of architects who were leaving for a study trip to the U.S.S.R.

I do not know what Russia looks like in the Khrushchev era, but I hope with all my heart that it appears sunnier and more smiling than it did upon our arrival in Leningrad. The way in which we were interrogated, our passports taken from us, the look of the carriages crossing the square, and the faces and clothes of the crowd swarming around our band of twenty students, suddenly regarded as millionaires, all told of distress. It is unnecessary, I think, to narrate in detail a voyage undertaken and described by so many persons with better qualifications than mine. We followed strictly planned itineraries, accompanied by pleasant Intourist ladies and even by one American girl, a so-called tourist, so obviously a spy that we were soon relieved of her company. Our guardian angels found it very difficult to keep us together and prevent us from seeing the hideous poverty then reigning everywhere. The façades of the buildings were crumbling; in the traffic-less streets an empty-faced crowd paraded before shops with empty windows. Foreigners were lodged in hotels whose appointments had been luxurious before 1914 but now were no longer in working order. Food fit for a wartime siege did little to appease our appetites, sharpened by walking. If I had not been attacked by bedbugs I might have enjoyed the monotonous poetry of the Volga River. Only the Caucasus, the fringe of the black Sea—the Russian Riviera—seemed to be pleasant and habitable, thanks to the climate.

This 1931 journey to the U.S.S.R. abounded in surprises; I marveled at the country's civilization in times past; I was disappointed by the horrible present, and admired the people's capacity to exist at such a low level without losing faith in their future and their mission. To be fair, one must allow for the influence of the eternal Orient in this picture of poverty and disorder. Yet nothing will make me alter my impression that under the Czars Russia knew a better standard of life

than the one I saw. It may be—I hope so—that such a huge sacrifice has not been accepted and borne in vain. But I must say we breathed a sigh of relief when our passports were returned and the boat sailed out of Soviet waters. We were glad to be going back to the West, in spite of the financial crisis, and in my own case the many family sorrows.

The third-class cabins in our cargo boat serving the Black Sea ports seemed to me luxury indeed. As for the bazaars of Trebizond and their worthless trinkets, they were like Ali Baba's magic cave. Our route was surpassingly beautiful, and I saw for the first time both Athens and Constantinople. As the end of the voyage drew near I felt I should have to face new trials. I did not know that as soon as I landed in France I should have to prepare for another journey, the one Céline was to call by a name so fitting to my new fate: "Journey to the End of the Night."

At Marseilles I found a telegram from my partner telling me that he, too, was ruined. I wondered what would happen and what I should do, what decision I should make. My family had gone back to Normandy, since they could no longer afford their apartment in Paris. I was alone. For the first time I felt I understood what life was about.

I left the house which had always been home, and since I could not afford hotels, sought refuge in other people's houses. One by one my friends were kind and welcoming. I tried to be as quiet and self-effacing as possible, so that they should never guess how often I came back at night supperless.

I was busy trying to sell the pictures in the gallery, an incredibly difficult ask in those panic-stricken times. Paintings which today would be worth millions of francs fetched hardly a few tens of thousands. With the rare exceptions of wealthy patrons and collectors like the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles and David Weill, dealers were forced to sell pictures

to one another at ever-decreasing prices. Any day when we did not suffer a staggering loss was to be considered successful. I separated from my partner, Jacques Bonjean, only to share in the even worse luck of Pierre Colle. We went from losses to forced sales, meanwhile continuing to put on Surrealist or Abstract exhibitions, which only drove away the last private collectors.

The general crisis worsened; I had to help my impoverished family and the situation seemed hopeless not only in my eyes but in those of a whole generation. Today I can see that since my misfortune was shared by several friends of the same age and tastes, our distress was not altogether unbearable. Countless times, when I was tired of waiting in my shop for the unlikely arrival of clients, I took refuge for hours with Marcel Herrand at the Hotel Rochambeau, which, like the hotel Vouillemont in the rue Boissy d'Anglas managed by the charming Delle Donnes, extended inexhaustible credit. This was essential, because some of us had decided that, whatever happened, we should never pay for anything. Maurice Sachs, the richest and most ruined of us all, formulated this new rule of life in the Land of Despair.

In the end, our deserted gallery had to close its doors. Since we still had to eat and drink, the kindly Moyses, who ran the "Boeuf-sur-le-Toit," often welcomed us in the evening, as "old clients" whom he had known in balmier days. But his establishment, which had also been hit by the slump, had withdrawn from the rue Boissy d'Anglas into a house that was due for demolition on the rue de Penthièvre. Although he had lowered his prices, Moyses was able to sustain the glory of our dear "Boeuf," and the rich clients who kept it going had no idea that this cosmopolitan rendezvous was also a shelter for bankrupt Bohemians.

I ended up by sharing with my friend Bongard (the one who

welcomed me later in New York) two wretched attic rooms where he was living. Everything was leaky—the roof, the water, the electricity, and later our finances. The house, which in more glorious days had given shelter to Benjamin Franklin, was doomed to destruction by wreckers. But nothing can stop youth from laughing and having a good time. Those who still had some small means hastened to rally around us. For a night, with the help of a few bottles, a piano and gramophone, we would keep the mice away as we invented fantastic amusements. Charades in fancy dress were raised to the dignity of an institution, and I can see us still, Bongard, his friends and myself, dressed up as God knows what, trotting from door to door in order to arrive unnoticed at some masked ball. But we were dancing on a volcano that was just about to erupt.

After so many worries, and so many skipped meals, the inevitable happened; I fell ill—seriously ill—and had to leave at once for a high altitude. As there was then no kind of health insurance, my friends clubbed together to help me. Thanks to their generosity, I was able to spend a year, first at Font-Romeu and then in the Balearic Islands, where the cost of living was a great deal lower than in France. It was during this retreat from Paris, where I had always been content to admire the artistic achievements of others, that I discovered the desire to create something of my own. I learned the art of tapestry making and became tremendously enthusiastic about it. I then drew some designs for tapestry, and later considered setting up a workshop. I was discouraged by both my own lack of means and the general lack of interest in tapestry. Nevertheless this attempt at craftsmanship left me with the wish to use my hands.

On my return to Paris I found my family in desperate straits, having sold almost all their possessions of any value.

I persuaded them to sell what was left and go live in the south of France. I then looked around for a regular job. It was not without reluctance that I resigned myself to making the rounds of the various places which might offer employment—insurance companies, banks, accountants. It was scarcely the right moment to be seeking a job. I came to know all the minor anxieties of the unemployed—the fear that I would not get to the newspaper stand in time to study the “help wanted” column, the hasty perusal in order to memorize the hopeful addresses, the rush to try to arrive ahead of the crowd of other applicants.

In the course of one of these sterile expeditions, I went to see Lucien Lelong, to apply for some sort of office job. I shall never know quite what prompted me but I suddenly heard myself blurting out the words: “I think I would be more useful working on the actual dressmaking side of the business.”

At that moment my downward descent was stopped temporarily. I was lucky enough to sell a large Dufy plan of Paris which I still had in my possession. Poiret had commissioned it for the decoration of his *Amours, Délices et Orgues* at the fabulous time of the Decorative Arts Exposition; several years later he was ruined and sold it to me. This windfall gave me time to breathe and to suspend my vain pilgrimages to Paris business offices; I could also help my family. Jean Ozenne suggested that I should come and live with him, in his charming apartment on the Quai Henri Quatre, which has a most beautiful view of the Seine, the square of the Ile Saint-Louis, and the distant Panthéon. There was nothing to indicate that after 1945 Jean Ozenne would have an extremely successful theatrical career, for he was then a busy fashion designer. Seeing him work, and being totally unoccupied, I began to imitate him.

Not only did Jean give me encouragement and allow me

to learn from his experience but he also offered to show my designs to his regular clients along with his own. An American friend named Max Kenna, likewise a designer, taught me to use the paintbrush and to mix colors. Feeling very daring, I started to submit sketches to the magazines. One evening Jean returned in triumph; he had sold half a dozen of my designs at twenty francs each. It was the first money I had ever earned by my own creative inspiration and I was transported with joy. Those 120 francs, which I owed to the efforts of a faithful friend, were like the first gleam of sun after a long night. At this unforgettable moment my whole future was decided.

It was in this fashion that at the age of thirty I discovered my true bent. I went down to the south of France to look after my family's affairs and also to work hard at designing. It seems incredible to think that despite my love of art and my many artistic friends I scarcely knew how to wield a pencil. For two months I worked night and day at producing ideas and then went back to Paris, my pockets stuffed with designs, determined to win a place for myself in the world of fashion. My hat designs found plenty of buyers but my dresses, which were decidedly less inspired, were correspondingly less successful. Two good friends, Michel de Brunhoff and Georges Geoffroy, did not spare me their criticism and I was stung to further efforts. Living from hand to mouth on the proceeds of the few sketches which I sold, one by one, at the price of interminable hours in waiting rooms and offices, I labored on. But this slow progress toward the establishment of my reputation, which lasted for two long years, was infinitely less painful than the struggle for uncongenial employment which had preceded it; after all, I was fighting on a battlefield of my own choice.

I was then living in the Hotel de Bourgogne, on the Place

du Palais-Bourbon, where the clientele was divided between intellectuals of the pre-Sartre era—who were later to compose the fauna of the Café Flore—and provincials, attracted by the nearness of Sainte-Clotilde and their relatives in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Georges Geoffroy, who lived at the same hotel, introduced me to Robert Piguet, who was then becoming well known. The couturier bought several sketches of mine and then asked me to make several dresses for his coming collection. At last I was able to see one of my designs put into concrete form. So 1937 marked the end of my years of apprenticeship. I was no longer a humble designer who hung about waiting rooms but one whose name was known and whose visits were made by appointment. Most important of all, I was doing well enough to achieve the chief ambition of my life—a home of my own.

Apartments were then comparatively easy to find. It was while I was selling some designs in the rue Royale that I saw the notice "to let" at number 10. I was shown five large rooms which had been empty for more than a year and told that I could also have the floor below. I settled for a rent of 8,000 francs a year, and proceeded to install my own furniture, pictures and other possessions.

To tell the truth, in the beginning the rooms were still very bare, but what did it matter? I had my home.

In 1938 Piguet moved to the Rond-point des Champs-Élysées, and asked me to work for him regularly as a designer. I was thrilled at the offer and instantly accepted. At last I should get to know the mysterious means by which an idea is transformed into a dress; I should make an entrance, timid but fascinated, into the universe of *premières* and workrooms, and discover the secrets of cutting and stitching. Piguet was a charming but changeable master. His love of intrigue—which alone could awaken a flicker of gaiety in his cynical

eyes—made it somewhat difficult to work for him. But he appreciated my ideas and the models I designed for him were genuinely successful. I shall always remember the day when Christian Bérard introduced me to Marie-Louise Bousquet, as the creator of *Café Anglais*. This was a dress of *pied de poule*, with lace trimming, inspired by *Petites Filles Modeles*, which had created a great stir that season. Later, Marie-Louise Bousquet, always so quick to discover and encourage new talent, introduced me to Carmel Snow of *Harper's Bazaar*, and I really began to think that I had arrived.

What had in fact arrived even more surely than myself was the fatal year of 1939. It made its appearance in a burst of follies, such as always seem to precede a catastrophe. Paris had rarely seemed more scintillating. We flitted from ball to ball, clad in the surrealist style of Mme Schiaparelli. Facing the inevitable cataclysm, we were determined to go down in a blaze of glory.

Soon the "phony war" began. I was mobilized at Mehun-sur-Yèvre, in the country of Agnès Sorel, a far cry from my world of chiffon and sequins. I spent a year there, in sabots, with peasants from the region of Berry. I truly believe our nature is composed of many different elements. For, again penniless—naturally I had no savings—I forgot dressmaking very quickly. Living for the first time in the real country, I became passionately fond of it, and developed a feeling for working the land, the cycle of the seasons, and the perpetually renewed mystery of germination. The disaster of June, 1940, found me, thank God, in the southern zone of France, where it was easy enough for me to join my father and sister at their retreat at Callian, a little village in the Var.

My experience at Mehun had taught me that I had a strong streak of the peasant in my veins, and with my sister I decided to cultivate the little piece of land which surrounded the

house. Callian has admirable soil for vegetables, and they fetched excellent prices on the market during this period of restrictions. We pulled up flowers and bushes and concentrated on peas and string beans. To get through the three months which separated us from our harvest, all we had to live on was the 800 francs which I had been given upon demobilization.

Then, by a miracle, practically the last foreign money allowed into France reached me at Callian. A few weeks before the war I had sent to America four or five paintings (all that remained of my defunct gallery) which were unsalable in Paris. Max Kenna, back in the States, undertook to sell them, and by roundabout ways actually sent me \$1000 from the proceeds. Thus fortified we awaited the harvest, which we ourselves transported to Cannes, the neighboring market.

A good many Parisians had taken refuge in Cannes. In the course of my visits I met Victor Grandpierre, and Marc Doelnitz, who organized theatricals at the studio of the painter MacAvoy. The charades of my youth were now given a public performance. And while I was still busy with my peas and beans, I received news of the daily *Figaro*, which had taken refuge at Lyons. Before the war, my friend Paul Caldaguès had asked me to help with the women's page of the paper, where my designs were appearing regularly. Now I was asked to send some sketches from my retreat; and I was delighted to have an opportunity of keeping my hand in.

When interzonal communications became easier, we learned that life in Paris was somehow going on. The fashion houses had reopened their workshops, as much to provide employment for thousands of workers as out of patriotic pride, and Robert Piguet wrote asking me to take up my old job. I hesitated for a long time. I disliked intensely the idea of returning to a humiliated and beaten Paris. And with my new

countrified mentality I was fearful of the confinement and intrigues of studio life. I had also to make sure of the future of our agricultural venture under my sister's sole supervision. In short, it was not until the end of 1941 that I decided to accept Robert Piguet's offer.

When I eventually reached Paris, I found Piguet extremely embarrassed by my tardy arrival. After beating around the bush for a bit, he confessed that, weary of waiting for me, he had engaged in my place a young designer, previously with Chanel, named Antonio de Castillo. The fact that I heard his name for the first time in such unfavorable circumstances did not prevent Castillo and me from becoming excellent friends. In any case, this temporary setback turned to my advantage, for Paul Caldaguès, touched at my plight, introduced me to Lucien Lelong who engaged me on the spot. The house of Lelong was an excellent school of dressmaking. There was a solid tradition of good workmanship, thanks to some remarkable *premières* directed by Nadine Cassandre. I had had only a year and a half of experience with Piguet, and at Lelong, a much larger house, I learned a tremendous amount more about my new profession.

The creation of the models was not my responsibility alone, for Pierre Balmain, who had been with Lelong before the war, came back to his old job. No malicious rivalry ever divided us during the years we worked together. Love of fashion prevailed over love of self. Neither Balmain nor I will ever forget that, in spite of all the wartime restrictions and the constant fear of a sudden closing, Lelong taught us our profession. Such an apparently frivolous and futile trade risked earning the displeasure of the Germans; but a heterogeneous and undependable clientele assured our survival until the day of liberation.

Lelong was actually in the midst of preparing his winter collection when we were liberated; several weeks later, to the

amazement of the Allies, he was able to present them with a spectacle of very lively Paris fashions.

I sometimes wonder how I managed to carry on at all during those years, for my sister, with whom I had shared the cares and joys of the garden at Callian, was arrested and then deported in June, 1944. After vain efforts to trace her, I sought forgetfulness in complete absorption in my work.

Fashion in those days was—what it was—and subject to the laws of traveling by subway or bicycle and walking on wooden soles. Since dress material was lacking, imagination ran wild on hats. Composed of otherwise unusable remnants they were huge puffs which seemed to defy simultaneously both the misery of the times in which we were living and all canons of common sense. This style, matched by that of the masculine zoot-suiters, was surely one of the ugliest ever seen. How happy I was, a little later, to react against it.

PORTRAIT OF MYSELF

WE ALL HAVE our little weakness, or hobby, which is at the same time a source of strength. The thought of it carries us through the daily grind and gives significance to the moments of our (material) success when we have earned the means to indulge it. What is my particular weakness? I shall first of all name those weaknesses which I do not have.

Unless there is something outstanding to be seen, I take little pleasure in such entertainments as plays, moving pictures or night clubs. I am sometimes asked why I so seldom design for the theater, why my name so rarely appears on any poster or program. In my opinion, the art of costume design is essentially different from that of fashion. In 1939, when Marcel Herrand asked me to design the costumes for a production of Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, I was working anonymously at Piguet. These were the first costumes to which I put my name. Later I designed costumes for several films and ballets, but never with any particular pleasure. Designing for the theater requires a capacity for improvisation, for the sacrifice of craftsmanship to effect, which is alien to my temperament. I have horrifying memories of a ballet called *Thirteen Dances*, which I costumed at the request of Christian Bérard and Boris Kochno. We were still sewing the costumes onto the backs of the dancers when they were already in position to dance across the stage.

If I dislike entertainments, I must confess that I am still less prone to reading. With the exception of Balzac, I never

read novels any more; I am really interested only in books of history or archaeology.

Of course an interest in painting inspired my first business, the art gallery. And to terminate the list of my favorite distractions I shall admit to a great fondness for cards. I spend hours at patience, and over the wiles of bridge or the excitement of canasta—a sign of intellectual poverty, perhaps, but I may as well be honest about it.

My real hobby, as you have probably guessed, is architecture, which has fascinated me ever since I was a child. Prevented by my family and by circumstances from ever gratifying this passion, I found an outlet for it in dress design. I think of my work as ephemeral architecture, glorifying the proportions of the female body.

Couture has given me a further outlet for my passion by providing me with the money to gratify it. My first collection enabled me to give rein to my natural inclination as a builder. At that time I was living in a cottage near my friends Pierre and Carmen Colle, at Fleury, close by the forest of Fontainebleau. Here I started to look for my country home. It was to be neither a chateau nor a week-end villa, but a real rural retreat, a part of the countryside, preferably with a stream running through it.

My stay in Berry and in Provence had definitely marked my taste for the countryside, cultivation and gardening. My ideal strongly resembled Rousseau's thatched hut.

At last, near Milly, where Jean Cocteau had made the old bailiff's house famous, I found something that one of my friends described as "a ruin in a swamp." This was what had once been the mill of Coudret, whose watery surroundings particularly pleased me. Small, plain buildings, which had been stables, some barns, and the mill itself, without either windows or floors, were all built around a farmyard in the

shape of a horseshoe. The original roofs were almost sound, and so were the lichen-covered walls, with the exception of one wing restored in execrable taste by the last owner. My first step was to hack off all his embellishments with an ax—to the consternation of the agent. I then turned my attention to making the house habitable in the style I wanted. The widely differing character of the rooms enabled me to decorate them all in the same style without fear of monotony. I wanted something like those whitewashed provincial houses with their well-polished parlors where I had been taken as a child to call on my relatives. Above all, I wanted my first country home to look both lived in and livable. In spite of the artificiality of a rapid reconstruction, I obtained the natural and casual effect for which I was striving.

My garden I entrusted to the care of the faithful Ivan, who had done wonders with my place at Fleury. Despite its size, I wanted it to look like the little peasants' gardens which line the roads in my native Normandy. To achieve such a simple effect, the swamp had to be drained, the river channeled and the weeds cleared away. Then, with a view of flower beds and canals, I could retire into my hermitage and listen in peace to the bells of Milly.

Scarcely was the mill finished than I was faced with the problem of a home in Paris, corresponding to the social demands of my profession. The apartment in the rue Royale, which I had gradually furnished to my taste in a fin de siècle style, was now inadequate. I had to face the prospect of leaving it, and leaving, too, the four flights of stairs, which were no doubt holding my own "line" constantly imperiled by my love of good food!

I searched the whole of Paris with the exception of Passy, which I sedulously avoided—true to the fashion of the moment which dictated that one must at all costs live in the

Seventh *Arrondissement*. But it seemed that only Americans were capable of unearthing houses in the Guermantes district. So I scouted in the avenue Hoche and in Neuilly, but without success. Nothing seemed suitable. I won the reputation of being impossible in the eyes of the real estate agents, until once more luck came to my aid.

One morning my principal real estate agent telephoned me, and said in a weary voice:

"We've found a house for sale, but unfortunately it is in the boulevard Jules-Sandeau in Passy."

At that moment I experienced Proust's famous sensation of the *temps retrouvé*. I rushed to the address and found to my delight that it brought me within fifty yards of the rue Albéric-Magnard, where I had lived as a boy. There was the balcony with columns, which had so fascinated me, in an exquisite little house which had been built in 1905, the year of my birth, in candy-box style, for an actress. I immediately felt that this was *my* house. It was laden with arabesques, festoons and astragal moldings, but the layout was unexpectedly delightful. It included a winter garden which immediately reminded me of Granville. Without more ado, without even consulting an architect, I took the house and concentrated all my energies on its decoration.

The actress for whom the house had been built had lived a great deal in St. Petersburg in the days of the *Théâtre Marie*, and her fear of Nihilist assassins had led her to cover it with metal sheeting. Half blockhouse and half love nest, the house was the exact opposite of what a peace-loving bachelor of 1950 needed. Not without regret I had to decide to tear out garlands and cupids, languorous doorways and discreet alcoves. After that was done, I wanted the house to be just as Parisian and elegant as my mill at Fontainebleau was rustic and simple. I asked a trio of decorators—Victor Grandpierre, Georges

Geoffroy and Pierre Delbée from Jansen's—to make this a true town house for me.

It was to be filled with objets d'art, precious or worthless, so long as they appealed to my taste and expressed my personality. A Matisse drawing was to hang side by side with a Gothic tapestry, a Renaissance bronze with a pre-Columbian primitive. Good taste was much less important than my own taste, for after all, living in a house which does not suit you is like wearing someone else's clothes. I like an atmosphere built up little by little out of the whims and fancies of the owner. If I *had* to pin a definite style upon my town house, I should call it Louis XVI, but it would be 1957 Louis XVI, a contemporary and sincere version.

As I finish this book, I am in the process also of finishing the decoration of my house in Provence, at Montauroux, near Callian, where good fortune allowed me to find peace and to prepare a new existence fifteen years ago. I cannot describe this new house fully, since it is still not completed. It is simple, solid, and dignified. I hope its dignity conveys the period of life which I am entering. I think of this house as my real home, the home to which, God willing, I shall one day retire, the home where perhaps I shall one day forget Christian Dior, Couturier, and become my neglected self again.

I am in fact at Montauroux as I write these last lines; fate has brought me into the calm and peace of the Provençal countryside to put the last touch to my work. Night is falling and with it infinite peace. The avenue Montaigne seems far away for I have spent the day among my vines inspecting the future wine harvest. The first stars have come out and are reflected in the pool opposite my window.

It is the moment to bring the two Christian Diors face to face: myself, and this Siamese twin of mine to whom I owe my success. It is fitting that we should meet here among the

vines and the jasmine for I have greater confidence in myself when I am close to the soil.

What conclusions do I draw from this fateful meeting? First of all, he and I do not belong in the same world. *He* lives entirely in the century to which he owes his birth; he loves to shock and to revolutionize. I have never lost the simple tastes and habits of my Norman childhood, my love of solid, well-laid foundations.

It is for this reason that I have always tried to build my fashions on a solid base. True luxury needs good materials and good workmanship; it will never succeed unless its roots are profoundly imbedded in sober influences and honest traditions. Lack of money is turning the present century away from frivolity; modern dress must be straightforward and dependable. The designer must plan a dress for long use, even if it is only worn for a single evening. Fantasy for the sake of fantasy, extravagance for the sake of extravagance, belong to the world of costume, not fashion. Fashion is destined to be worn elegantly in the streets and drawing rooms, and must obey its own strict laws.

Mlle Chanel gave the best definition of it when she said: "Dressmaking creates beautiful things which become ugly; while art creates ugly things which become beautiful."

I venture to correct Mlle Chanel in one respect: there is such a thing as the posthumous vengeance of fashion, and the ugly can become beautiful again with the passing of time. Nevertheless it is true that we work under an ephemeral star, and only precision of design, excellence of cut and quality of workmanship can save us. That is the reason for the strict attention I pay to details, because in matters of elegance, the detail is as important as the essential. When it is bad, it destroys the whole effect.

I believe that in my own way I have worked on the same

principle as the other members of my circle of friends. Christian Bérard painted faces devoured by a burning passion in reaction to the inflexible canons of the Cubist manifesto which for twenty years forbade the reproduction of the human figure. Francis Poulenc and Henri Sauguet have opposed lyric music to pedantic composition. Pierre Gaxotte's warmhearted *Histoire des Français* contrasts with the Michelet school of history. Within my own sphere I have been equally reactionary: I have battled against everything to whose triumph I objected. Dressmaking is a means of expression like any other, and I have tried to impose my taste and temperament through my clothes. A model must simultaneously keep in line and surprise by storm. As a garment, it must respect certain laws; but as a creation it must dare certain extravagances. There is room for audacity in the framework of tradition.

A particular fashion pleases, or ceases to please, according to complex influences. The most successful fashion wears itself out the quickest, because it is overly imitated. Obviously, uniforms have the longest life. There will always be women who cling to a particular style of dress because they wore it during the time of their greatest happiness, but white hair is the only excuse for this type of eccentricity.

Dress has always interested women; indeed, it dates as far back as they do. But fashion, as we understand it, can be traced no further back than the eighteenth century. Except for the famous Rose Bertin, seamstress to Marie Antoinette, no dressmaker received notice in the press for another hundred years. Now a couturier is a regular newspaper feature, and may even be asked to write his memoirs!

How has this change come about? Modern advertising has spread fashion throughout the world, and accelerated its rhythm. But this in itself did not create curiosity about a designer. I believe it comes from the fact that in the world

today dress design is one of the last repositories of the marvelous, and the couturier is one of the last possessors of the wand of Cinderella's fairy godmother. The need for display, which is dormant in all of us, can express itself nowadays in fashion and nowhere else; that is why magazines devote yards of space to it and why designers are still able to present a sumptuous new collection every season. The dresses of this collection may be worn by only a few of the thousands of women who read and dream about them, but high fashion need not be directly accessible to everyone: it need only exist in the world for its influence to be felt.

Wherever it passes, even late or inappropriately, fashion defends the rights of imagination and endows frivolity with a moral code. When someone objects to the fact that elegant clothes are ill suited to the serious times in which we live, I reply that a period of happiness is no doubt on the way, when these frivolous fashions will come into their own. From that point of view, the maintenance of the tradition of fashion is in the nature of an act of faith. In a century which attempts to tear the heart out of every mystery, fashion guards its secret well. The best possible proof of its magic is that there has never been so much discussion about it as now.

I am speaking lightly of fashion—but my tone is tinged with respect. Even the most uninformed person can see the painstaking effort that has gone into the maddest collections. The great adventure of Paris fashion design is not merely a sort of Vanity Fair. It is the outward sign of an ancient civilization, which intends to survive.

Suddenly I take a friendlier view of my public self. Perhaps this wretched couturier has something to be said for him, after all. He guarantees the bright worldly aspect of fashion and hence the livelihood of its practitioners. Even his excesses are necessary, for they keep public taste alive. Meanwhile I

can lurk in his brilliant shadow, and keep to myself the best part of our dual personality. I can take care of the actual work, from the idea to the dress, which is my whole reason for living.

Therefore, for the first time in the ten years since the founding of my house, I am willing to identify myself with the double, born of my reputation, who really does not resemble me at all.

